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PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF 2, 3, AND 4-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN: 1963-1983

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro PH.D. 1984

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF 2, 3, AND 4-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN: 1963-1983

by

Mary Louise Hanson Moore

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the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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ABSTRACT

MOORE, MARY LOUISE HANSON, Ph.D. Parental Perceptions of 2, 3, and 4-Year-Old Children: 1963-1983. (1984) Directed by Dr. Helen Canaday. 126 pp.

The purpose of this study was to assess parental perceptions of specific characteristics of their children over a period of two decades from 1963 to 1983. The questionnaire Your Child and His Development completed by a parent of each child in the Toddler Two and Nursery School programs at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, supplied data about family and child characteristics of 257 children, ages 2, 3, and 4. The children were enrolled in the years 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978, or 1983.

Data analysis was descriptive. The analysis of family characteristics found few changes in families in this sample between 1963 and 1983. Two changes identified were an increase in part-time employment of mothers and an increased participation in a family activity, reading to the child, by fathers.

Only slight differences were found in parental perceptions of boys and girls. Girls exceeded boys in the number of self-help skills reported in every year sampled. Although some characteristics were reported more frequently for boys (courageous) and others for girls (bossy, whines), both boys and girls were most frequently described as happy, affectionate, and cheerful. Sex of the child was not related to methods of control, response to discipline, the number of family activities, or reported fears.

Both self-help activities and family activities increased with age. Aggressiveness was reported to decrease with age. As children grew older, they were more likely to have noticed the difference between girls and boys and to have asked "where babies come from." Reasoning became a more effective method of discipline as children aged from 2 to 4. Four-year-olds were most frequently reported to respond to discipline with obedience, whereas 2- and 3-year-olds were most likely to cry.

Neither the child's ordinal position nor employment status of the mother resulted in variations in reported self-help activities, family activities, child characteristics, or method of control.

The only marked change from 1963 to 1983 occurred in the increase in parental perception of children's fears in 3- and 4-year-olds. It was recommended that this finding be studied further.

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Each member of my Committee has been helpful in a special way. I thank Dr. Anthony DeCasper and Dr. Nancy White for their time and wisdom throughout my program as well as during the preparation of this dissertation. Dr. Sarah Shoffner provided valuable insights to the development of this dissertation.

When a professional woman returns to school, the support of her colleagues is essential. Special thanks to my colleagues at Bowman Gray School of Medicine: Dr. Paul Meis, Chief of the Section on Maternal-Fetal Medicine, Penny Sharp, Department of Community Medicine, for her assistance in data analysis, and to Linda Trust and Portia Ellerbe, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, for manuscript preparation.

When a wife and mother returns to school, the support of her husband and children are particularly important. To Richard Moore, my husband, and to our children, Richard, William, John Christopher, and Virginia Anne, my special thanks.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The years between 1963 and 1983 were a time of marked change for American society and for families within that society. How did these changes affect children? One way of assessing the effects of change on children is through the perceptions of their parents.

A parent's perceptions of a child's characteristics and behavior may or may not reflect the perceptions of other people who know that child. Neighbors, teachers, or grandparents, for example, may see a child in much the same way or in a very different way. Nevertheless, parental perceptions can be powerful in themselves. Broussard (1979), in a longitudinal study of mothers and their healthy full-term infants over a 16-year period, found that the critical variable associated with a child's psychosocial development was the mother's early perception of her baby. The data from that study indicated that the association between a mother's perception of her newborn infant (using Broussard's Neonatal Perception Inventory) and the subsequent development of the child persisted over time and was predictive of problems of mental disorder at ages 10 to 11. Broussard suggested two explanations of the association. It may be that the mother's perception of her child as different was accurate. However, the same children in the study were rated as "normal" by the physicians providing health care, a fact which caused Broussard to favor the alternative explanation that maternal perception becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: the mother's perception

influences her interaction with the infant, which in turn influences the infant's behavior.

The importance of parental perceptions of children and their subsequent development is also suggested in studies of differential perception of children based on the child's sex. On the first day after birth, daughters of first-time parents were rated as being softer, smaller, less attentive, and as having finer features than sons of first-time parents were (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974). Other studies have shown differential behavior which varies with both sex of parent and sex of infant (Moss, 1967; Thoman, Leiderman, & Olson, 1972). Walters and Walters (1980) raised the same question that Broussard did in relation to these studies; i.e., is the perception the basis of subsequent behavior or are there truly subtle differences in the infants to which parents responded? Support for the importance of the former, i.e., that interactional behavior is based on the parents' perception, comes from studies in which subjects attributed different characteristics to the same infant who was called male in some instances and female in others (Seavey, Katz, & Zalk, 1975; Will, Self, & Datan, 1976).

Changes in Parental Perceptions Over Time

Changes in parental perception are evident over generations. In past centuries, children were believed to need frequent and severe corrective discipline, and thus even minor offenses were often punished with "marked severity" (Bossard & Boll, 1966, p. 497). In the eighteenth century, parents believed that

> The first duties of children are in great measure mechanical: an obedient child makes a bow, comes and goes, speaks, or is silent, just as he is bid, before he knows any other reason

> for doing so than that he is bid (Nelson, 1753; cited in Kessen, 1979).

In colonial America, "a pert child was thought to be delirious and bewitched;" meekness and formality were valued in children (Bossard & Boll, p. 503). In the early twentieth century, many parents perceived a good child as one who would "do things at a regular time in a regular way so that when he is older, he will fit into our scheme of organized living" (Bartlett, 1932, p. 227).

Purpose of Current Study

In this study, the perceptions of a sample of parents of 2, 3, and 4-year-old children attending the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Toddler Two and Nursery School programs in the years 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978 and 1983, were examined in relation to particular questions about child personality and behavior.

The purposes of this study were to answer the following questions:

1. Did the parent who completed the questionnaire describe specific characteristics of the child's personality and behavior differently in the years sampled: 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978, and 1983?
2. Did the child's sex affect the parent's description of the child's personality and behavior in the years sampled?
3. Did the child's age affect the parent's description of the child's personality and behavior in the years sampled?
4. Did the mother's employment status affect the parent's description of the child?
5. Did the child's ordinal position affect the parent's description?

Before exploring these questions, the researcher reviewed specific family trends in the United States during the decades 1963 to 1983. During these two decades there have been a number of changes in family life in the United States: a decrease in family size, an increase in labor force participation by married women, and an increase in divorce rates and in the number of children involved in divorce. An understanding of the macroenvironment of societal change is important to an understanding of the way in which individual parents perceive their children. Kessen (1979, p. 815) noted that "American children are shaped and marked by the larger cultural forces." For preschool children an important mediation of those larger cultural forces must be the child's parents and the perceptions those parents have of their child.

Family Trends in the United States: 1960-1982

The decades spanning the years 1963 to 1983 have been a time of major change in American family life. Family trends of that period are characterized by both women and men seeking more education and establishing careers before beginning families, improved methods of contraception, and, in the past decade, the availability of legal pregnancy termination contributing to later marriage and later first birth. Moreover, the size of families is growing smaller, with one or two children the norm for a majority of families. Table 1 shows the decrease in families having three or more children.

Furthermore, the number of mothers employed outside of the home has increased markedly. In 1960, only 18% of mothers in a home with the husband present worked outside their homes; by 1980, 45% of mothers in similar circumstances worked away from home--an increase of 150%.

Table 1

Families in the United States with Three or More Children

Year	Percentage of all families in United States
1955	17.5
1960	20.5
1965	22.1
1970	20.4
1975	16.2
1980	12.0

Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1981, p. 46.

Increases are less marked for mothers who were separated and divorced, because a higher percentage of separated and divorced women were employed in 1970 (Table 2).

The incidence of divorce (Table 3) has led to a 340% increase in the number of children involved in divorce, from 347,000 in 1955 to 1,181,000 in 1979. Divorce statistics are also reflected in the number of families with children under 18 headed by a single mother (Table 4).

The Current Research

Beginning in 1963 and continuing to the present, parents of children enrolled in the Toddler Two and Nursery School programs at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, have completed a nine-page

questionnaire, Your Child and His Development (Appendix), which provides information about family and home life (demographic data about marital status, education, civic activities, employment, family size), routines (eating, sleeping, elimination and self-help), activities (play, companions, pets, group activities), and behavior and development (discipline, personality traits, behavior with which parents felt they needed help, and sex interest and instruction). The data are filed in each child's individual folder. Folders are arranged alphabetically by the last name of the child for all years except the current school year.

Table 2

Labor Force Status: Married, Separated, and Divorced Women with Children Under Age 6

	Percentage in labor force		
Year	Married husband present	Separated	Divorced
1960	18.6	NA	NA
1970	30.3	45.4	70.9
1975	36.6	49.1	72.1
1980	45.0	51.8	74.5

Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1981, p. 388.

Table 3

Divorce Rate Per 1,000 Population: United States and North Carolina

Year	Rate, U.S.[1]	North Carolina
1960	2.2	
1963	2.3	
1965	2.5	2.3
1968	2.9	NA
1970	3.5	2.7
1973	4.4	3.5
1975	4.9	3.4
1978	5.2	4.8
1980 (prel.)	5.3	4.8
1981		5.0
1982		4.9

[1]From 1963 to 1978 U.S. rates are given for the year in which other data for this project were collected. Rate is per 1,000 population.

Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1981, p. 80.

Records for children enrolled in the years 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978 and 1983 were examined for perceptions of the parent completing the form.

From the available data, the following variables were selected:

1. Year in which form was completed
2. Sex of child

Table 4

Female Family Householders with One or More Children Under 18

Year	Number	Percentage of all families	Percentage of families < 35 years old	Number	Percentage of all white families	Percentage of white families < 35 years old	Number	Percentage of all black families	Percentage of black families < 35 years old
1960	1,891	7.4	35.0	1,394	6.0	30.7	497	20.7	47.1
1970	2,926	10.2	43.1	1,995	7.8	39.8	912	30.6	50.0
1980	5,288	17.4	51.5	3,511	13.5	48.5	1,745	46.8	58.0

Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1981, p. 86.

3. Age of child
4. Marital status of parents
5. Presence of step-parent
6. Parental age
7. Parental education (highest grade complete; major field of study)
8. Occupation
9. Extent of employment (full-time, part-time, full-time home-maker, ill or disabled)
10. Number of children in family
11. Child's ordinal position in the family
12. Child's self-help skills
13. Family activities
14. Respondent's perception of mother's and father's discipline
15. Reaction of child to discipline
16. Usual and most effective method of control
17. Personality characteristics
18. Fears
19. Behavior needing help
20. Sex interest (interest in own body, notice of differences between boys and girls, and curiosity about where babies comes from)

The data from Your Child and His Development were coded and prepared for computer analysis. The analysis was descriptive, and was designed to provide an overall picture of the perceptions of the parents of children in the two University of North Carolina, Greensboro,

programs and to evaluate the potential of Your Child and His Development as a resource for further research.

Significance of this Study

This chapter has documented some of the societal and family changes in the decades between 1963 and 1983: a decrease in family size, an increase in labor force participation by married women, and an increase in divorce rates and in the number of children involved in divorce. There have been few studies, however, that have examined how these changes affect parents' perceptions of children. Most studies of parents' perceptions (usually maternal perceptions) have focused on specific groups such as single-parent, female-headed households (Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney, & Hunt, 1979; Ambert, 1982) or divorced mothers (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

The data from Your Child and His Development provided the opportunity to examine perceptions of 257 parents of children ages 2, 3, and 4 at five-year intervals from 1963 to 1983. Changes in the sample families over these years were identified in answers to questions about marital status of parents, parental age, parental education, occupation, extent of employment (e.g. full-time outside home, part-time outside home, full-time homemaker), number of children in the family, adoptive status, and family activities.

The responding parents' perceptions of their children were evaluated by responses to questions about the child's self-help skills (e.g., bathing, dressing, toileting), reaction to discipline, personality characteristics, fears, behavior needing help (e.g., thumbsucking) and sex interest (interest in own body, in differences between boys and

girls, and in "where babies comes from"). The respondent's perception of each parent's discipline was also examined.

Models Relating Family Change and Changing Parental Perceptions of Children

The relationship between family change between 1963 and 1983 and parental perceptions of children during these same years could be expected to fit one of four models which are described here.

First, a knowledge of the changes in society from 1963-1983 and the changes in specific groups of parents that have been studied (Desimone-Luis et al., 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Ambert, 1982, for example) might have led a researcher to expect to find changes in both family characteristics and in parents' perceptions of their children. This model could be stated as follows:

Family change → changing perception of children.

A second possible finding was that changes would be demonstrated in one or more of the family characteristics, but that no change would be evident in the parent's perception of the child. The model would be the following:

Family change → no changing perception of children.

A third possibility could be the finding of little or no difference in family characteristics, but nevertheless a finding that parental perceptions of children were quite different in 1963 than in 1983. In this instance, it would be essential to seek the basis of that change in future research. The model for this contingency would be as follows:

No family change → changing perception of children.

A fourth possibility was finding a stability in this group of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Nursery School parents during the period 1963-1983. Neither family characteristics nor parents' perceptions of the child characteristics evaluated would have changed. Should this model be supported, i.e., should the characteristics of these families and the parents' perceptions of their children remain essentially unchanged in the midst of a changing world, it would then become important to ask some of the same questions to other groups in society that have experienced change in family characteristics not evident in this population of Nursery School parents. This model would be as follows:

No family change → no changing perception of children.

Based on the data describing societal change and the potential effects of these changes on children that have been suggested by studies reviewed in Chapter II, it was hypothesized that the data would best fit the first model, i.e., family change would lead to changing perceptions of children.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Because the purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of a sample of parents, literature was reviewed which addressed parental perspectives of children's characteristics or behavior. Moreover, because of the societal changes discussed in Chapter I, attention was paid to the effect on parental perceptions of factors such as marital status of parents and maternal employment. In addition, studies relating to the relationship between the ordinal position of the child in the family and sexuality and sex education among preschoolers were examined.

Since this study utilized data that were collected over two decades, the questions the respondent answered were not derived from the literature review. Most of the literature reviewed does not directly assess parental perceptions of children; however, factors important to these perceptions are suggested. The sex and age of the child, the presence or absence of a father, and socioeconomic status appeared to be important mediators of parental perception in a variety of family situations.

This study examined change over time, specifically the years 1963-1983. Did parental perceptions of children at each age from 2 through 4 change over the past three decades? Did the respondents find their children more or less able to help themselves? Did family activities increase or decrease? Did the respondent's perception of maternal

and paternal discipline change? Did the perception of the reaction of the child to discipline change? Has characterization of the child's personality changed? Did the respondent describe the child's sexual development differently? Was the sex, age or ordinal position of the child in the family related to change? Did maternal employment affect change?

The literature reviewed in this chapter suggested that marital status of the parents, social class, the child's sex and ordinal position in the family may be important in a parent's perception of his/her child. This study explored whether these factors were important in a group of families with a child at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Toddler Two and Nursery School programs in selected years from 1963-1983.

Changes in the American family during the decades 1963-1983 were noted in Chapter I. These changes included an increased incidence in maternal employment, divorce, and single parent-families. In this chapter the literature examining the relationship between these factors and parental perception of children will be reviewed. The effects of particular changes in American families on the children in those families have been a concern to many researchers. Studies have usually focused on a single change. No study comparable to the current study of parental perceptions of children over a period of two decades has been identified.

Marital Status of Parents: Separation, Divorce, and Single Parenthood

The increased incidence of separation and divorce in the past three decades has been documented in Chapter I. In several studies, divorce

has been found to be related to disruptions in parent-child relationships, particularly in the first year following the divorce.

The California Children of Divorce Project was a longitudinal study encompassing the years 1971-1977 and included 131 children from 58 of the 60 families originally selected (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). These authors noted that

> "by and large, child-care responsibilities belonged entirely to the mother. The pace was exhausting. Several mothers, newly working full-time, described their need to work past midnight regularly to complete household chores too numerous or difficult for young children to help with ... Younger children clamored for more attention, and often, of course, when the mother had the least energy available. Within six months of separation, one-quarter of the mothers interviewed judged themselves to be substantially less available to their children." (Wallerstein and Kelly, p. 25).

These findings were similar to those of Zussman (1980) and MacKinnon, Brody and Stoneman (1982). "Minimal parenting" was a term used by Zussman who found, in a laboratory analog, that when parents engaged in tasks that competed for their attention, they gave less attention to their children: they were slower to respond to their children and interacted with them for shorter periods of time. MacKinnon, Brody and Stoneman, in a study of home environments of 60 families of children aged 3 to 6, supported the concept of minimal parenting: the home environments of children whose mothers were divorced and working were found to be less cognitively and socially stimulating on the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Inventory than were home environments in which mothers were married and working or married and non-working.

Characteristics observed in preschool and kindergarten children whose parents were divorced by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) included fear, bewilderment, sadness, regression, "macabre fantasies" to explain the father's departure (p. 58), a temporary disruption in the ability to enjoy play, guilt, and emotional need. Although some children exhibited increased aggression, others inhibited aggression and were fearful of attacks.

Mothers described problems which included discipline (setting appropriate routines and formulating rules) and increased emotional and physical dependence on the parent coupled with the decreased physical and emotional availability of the parent. At the time of the first follow-up (1 year after the initial study), striking differences were found between the reactions of boys and girls, with boys being significantly more stressed.

Using both interviews and direct observations in laboratory situations, Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1978) examined family functioning and parent-child interactions between 72 white, middle-class children attending nursery school and their divorced parents over a two-year period. Sex, age, and birth order were matched with that of children from intact homes, and an attempt was made to also match parents on age, education, and length of marriage. The authors found that the divorced parents tended to be less affectionate, made fewer maturity demands, communicated less well with their children and were less consistent in discipline and control than married parents. A parent checklist and a recording form divided into half-hour units evaluated the child's behavior. A father could record his child's

behavior for as long as three hours a day; a mother could keep a 24-hour record. The checklist of behaviors included those considered desirable and those considered noxious. Children in divorced families were judged by their parents to be more dependent, disobedient, aggressive, whining, demanding, and unaffectionate than children were in intact families.

Hetherington et al. (1978) found, as had Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), that the sex of the child was important. In Hetherington's study, diary recordings and interview findings showed that divorced parents communicated less, were less consistent, and used more negative sanctions with sons than with daughters. In a laboratory situation, divorced mothers exhibited fewer positive behaviors and more negative behaviors with sons than with daughters. Hetherington noted, however, that "divorced mothers may have given their children a difficult time, but mothers, especially divorced mothers, got rough treatment from their children ... Boys were more oppositional and aggressive; girls were more whining, complaining, and compliant" (p. 169).

In addition to the effects of sex, economic problems of the single-parent/female-headed family appeared to be another variable (Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney, & Hunt, 1979). These authors found that mothers were more likely to perceive their children as deviant when income dropped by 50 percent or more.

Ambert (1982) also found that mothers in single parent families, particularly those of low socioeconomic status (annual income below $12,000), described their children's behavior in negative terms. Eight of ten reported mainly problems and few joys. Three of ten mothers of high socioeconomic status (average income $33,000) also had little positive to report.

In Levy-Shiff's (1982) study of 40 Israeli father-absent children, similar findings are reported. The death of the father before the child's birth was the reason for father absence in all of the Israeli children, who ranged in age from 2 to 10 and who were compared with 139 children from intact families. Unlike many father-absent families, there was a socially acceptable reason for father's absence (all had died in the Yom-Kippur War of 1974), there was no paternal surrogate within the nuclear family, and there was no economic stress. The Israeli Ministry of Defense provided extensive financial and emotional support to these families whose dead fathers were considered heroes. Child behavior both at home and in the nursery school was assessed through home interviews, teacher questionnaires, and observation in the nursery school yard. Children of both sexes from mother-headed families were found to be more emotionally dependent and to show more separation anxiety behavior and more developmental and behavioral disturbances. Boys were less instrumentally independent when each was compared to children of the same sex from intact homes. Boys from mother-headed families showed more aggression and noncompliance and less adjustment to nursery school whereas girls did not differ. Levy-Shiff concluded that absence of the father in infancy and early childhood did indeed affect the reported and observed behavior of young children, and that the effects are substantially related to sex.

Although the issues considered in this review of divorced and single-parent households were not directly comparable to the questions in the current study, as a whole they painted a picture of a fairly negative parental perception of a child. Words like "whining,"

"complaining," "aggression," "non-compliance," "fear," "bewilderment," "sadness," and "unaffectionate" were used, suggesting more problems than joys.

Maternal Employment Outside of the Home

The increased incidence of maternal employment outside of the home during the past three decades was discussed in Chapter I. The effect of maternal employment on preschool children continues to be debated. Hoffman's review in 1979 suggested that although reciprocal interaction does affect infant development, "there is no evidence that the caretaker has to be the mother or that this role is better filled by a male or female" (p. 860). Gold and her colleagues found better social adjustment in two samples of 4-year-old children whose mothers had worked since their child's birth than in children of non-working mothers (Gold & Andres, 1978; Gold, Andres, & Glorieux, 1979).

Cogle and Tasker (1982) suggested that children's participation in housework played an important role in teaching them about family responsibility and home living skills that would carry over into their adult lives. Bronfenbrenner (1979) hypothesized that activities in which parents are obligated to talk to children may facilitate children's learning to talk; shared household tasks are an example of such activities. In a study of 105 two-parent, two-child families of school age children (Cogle & Tasker, 1982), maternal employment was important in relation to how much the child participated in household activities. Women who worked outside the home, particularly those who worked part-time, received less household help from their children (76% participation) than did full-time homemakers (91% participation). When mothers

were employed full-time there was 88% participation. O'Neil (1979) also reported a decrease in household contributions when the mother was employed. Yarrow, Scott, deLelver and Heinig (1962) found more planned shared activities with children among college-educated working mothers than among nonworking mothers.

Other variables which appeared important in an examination of the relationship between maternal employment and children included the sex and social class of the child (Hoffman, 1974; Gold & Andres, 1978). The nature of the mother's employment, i.e., job versus career, may also be important. If career is defined as employment "where people work a lot of extra hours without extra pay" and where they are "sometimes away from home evenings and weekends" (Scanzoni, 1978), the difference between a job and a career would seem important, although currently unexamined.

Although none of the studies reviewed addresses the concept of maternal perceptions as the current study does, these studies did suggest that maternal employment may affect life-style, including participation in family activities. The presence, or indeed the absence, of differences in perception of children in relation to maternal employment should provide an additional perspective to the data about maternal employment.

Ordinal Position of the Child in the Family

A number of studies have examined the relationship between the child's birth order and the parent's interaction with a child. Ausubel, Sullivan and Ives (1980, p. 208) noted that although variables such as changing age of parents may confound the effects of the child's birth order, "some tentative findings ... are worthy of note."

In relation to the variables included in this study, it has been found that parents are more anxious and less permissive with firstborn children than with subsequent children (Clausen, 1966; Sears, 1950). The lastborn child frequently received more affection and was spanked less often than were the older children (Clausen).

Kidwell (1982) reported that 2,200 adolescent males tended to perceive that parental behavior toward them (punishment, supportiveness, and explanation of rules) varied with their birth order. In particular, the male middleborn adolescents "felt cheated of parental attention" (p. 226). Kidwell noted that most birth order studies compare firstborns with "laterborns" and stated that "future studies should make careful ... distinctions between all birth order categories" (p. 234).

Sexuality and Sex Education Among Preschoolers

Education of children in topics related to sexuality appears to be more widely discussed in the 1980's than it was in the 1960's. However, even in the 1980's, "knowledge about the sex education plans and practices of parents of young children is particularly scarce" (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982). Those authors found that body differences, the birth process, and obscene words were the topics 82 mothers and 70 fathers expected to discuss with their children before the child was five years old, with discussions of reproduction in the fifth year. Parents reported that they expected to feel at least moderately comfortable in discussing sexual topics with their children, a fact which Koblinsky and Atkinson suggested may be related in part to the relatively high level of education of the parents surveyed; 66% of mothers and 69% of fathers had a college diploma or advanced degree.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interaction theory stresses the importance of mental variables such as perception to both behavior and interaction (Burr, Leigh, Randall, & Constantine, 1979). Burr proposed, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p. 65). In addition, symbolic interaction theory includes concepts such as quality of role enactment and role strain which are applicable to the changes that have been described, single parenthood and maternal employment, for example.

Quality of role enactment is a critical feature of symbolic interaction theory; the term refers to how well one does what one is expected to do in a given role (Burr et al., 1979). Role strain was defined by Goode (1960) as "felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations." Sarbin and Allen (1968) used the term "cognitive strain" to refer to the same factor. "It is the stress generated within a person when he or she either cannot comply or has difficulty complying with the expectations of a role or set of roles" (Burr et al., 1979, p. 57). The absence of role strain is associated with feelings of "being all caught up" or "everything's under control."

The major changes of the past three decades during which mothers have added employment roles to those of mother and wife or single parent may have resulted in role strain for some women and thus affected the quality of role enactment. During the 1960's and early 1970's, both individuals and society as a whole have debated issues such as the effect of mother's work outside the home on child development. Mixed messages from friends, family, and the media contribute to role strain and the quality of role enactment.

Unanswered is the question of how societal changes may have affected a parent's perception of a child. If parents perceive their children differently in 1983 than they did in 1963, can variables such as maternal employment and single parenthood account for that difference? Data in Your Child and His Development collected over a 20-year period will help to provide answers to these questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODS OF PROCEDURE

During the past two decades, parents have completed a questionnaire entitled Your Child and His Development (Appendix), describing both themselves and their children, prior to entrance into one of the nursery school programs at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. These information sheets were the data base for the current study. Data were compiled from all completed information sheets from the years selected (1963, 1968, 1973, 1978 and 1983), were transferred to code forms, and then to the computer for analysis using OS/360 SPSSH Batch System, University of Kansas Honeywell Conversion.

Purposes

The purposes of this study were two-fold. The first purpose was to assess perceptions of a group of parents concerning specific characteristics of their children during the decades 1963-1983, utilizing the form Your Child and His Development. These perceptions were examined for trends that may have occurred over the 20-year span. These perceptions were further evaluated in relation to the sex and age of the child and were compared with literature describing the finding of other researchers during that decade.

Family variables were examined first. The literature suggested an increase in single-parent families and in maternal employment and a decrease in the number of adoptive children. These variables, along with data about age, education, and occupation of both parents, were analyzed.

A variety of child activities, behaviors, and characteristics were examined. These behaviors included self-help skills (dressing, washing and toileting, for example), personality traits (irritable, shy, calm, and self-controlled, for example), types of fears, behaviors the parent felt needed help (thumbsucking, stuttering, and swearing, for example), usual family activities (reading, routines, and picnics, for example), and sex interest.

Several questions relating to discipline were explored. These included usual and effective methods of control and the response of the child to discipline.

A second purpose of the study was to evaluate the potential of the record Your Child and His Development as a data base for further research. In this research, certain segments of the data used served as examples of the potential of the document for future research. Data are available for more than 1,000 children; frequently, a child was enrolled for two or more years.

The Sample

The sample consisted of all children ages 2, 3, and 4, who were enrolled in the Toddler-Two or Nursery School program at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, in the years 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978 and 1983. The document Your Child and His Development was filed in each child's folder. The sample for the years 1963 through 1978 was obtained by checking records in the Nursery School. Records were filed by child name, rather than by year. Records for 1983 were obtained from the Nursery School office; the children in the 1983 sample were enrolled at the time data were being prepared for analysis. Their records were in the current files of the Toddler Two Center and Nursery School.

The Questionnaire: Your Child and His Development

The questionnaire Your Child and His Development was developed to provide Nursery School and Toddler Two Center personnel with information about a child and that child's family which would enable personnel to provide individualized care for that child. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first, general information, included the child's name and the name by which he is called, sex, date and place of birth, church preference, and dietary religious practices. Three questions focusing on adoption, inquired if the child was adopted, what the child's age was at adoption, and if the child knew of the adoption. In this study sex, birth date, adoption, age of adoption, and knowledge of adoption were selected as variables.

The second section focused on family and home. Questions included parents' names, address, phone number, and length of residence at present address. Marital status was evaluated by asking about separation, divorce, and whether one parent was a step-parent. Information about date and place of birth, height, weight, health, siblings, education, occupation, and civic activity was collected for both mothers and fathers. Questions about siblings included the name, sex, age, birthday, and grade in school of all children in the family, the presence of step- or half-siblings, and deceased siblings. The name, age and relationship of the child to other household members, the amount of time the child was cared for by other family members, the child's places of residence since birth, and the child's separation from either parent for a long period of time completed the questions in this section.

A third section examined routines: eating, sleeping, elimination, and self-help. The child's appetite range, whether the child ate alone or with the family, his ability to feed himself, food allergies, foods eliminated from the diet by doctor's order, favorite foods and disliked foods, vitamin supplements, and feeding problems were questioned. Questions about sleeping included approximate bed time and waking time, attitude and usual activities at bed time, place of sleeping, and nap time and rest periods.

Several questions focused on the age of initiation of toilet training and the extent of bladder and bowel control, the child's response to training both during the day and at night, and any irregularities and difficulties associated with bowel training.

Self-help skills were identified by asking the respondent to "circle those things which the child usually does himself." The choices presented were that he dress himself, undress himself, wash face, wash hands, bathe himself, use toilet for urination, use toilet for bowel movement, put on wraps, take off wraps, put clothes away, put toys away, lace shoes, brush teeth, comb hair, and tie shoes.

A fourth section explored a variety of activities in which the child might engage. Questions included sites of indoor and outdoor play, the child's contentment at playing alone or with others, the age and sex of his most frequent playmates, favorite activities, and favorite indoor and outdoor toys. Several questions focused on relationships with children within and outside of the family and the amount of time spent each day with father and mother. The parent was asked to circle activities jointly engaged in by members of the family and the child

from the following list: reading, listening to music, routines, hobbies, excursions to the park or airport or railroad, marketing, nature walks, picnics, gardening and yard work, television, playing ball, drive-in movies, stories, cooking, helping with household duties, riding, and others. In addition, the parent was asked if the child enjoyed stories, who usually read to him, and if the child could read. Other questions concerned the activities the respondent enjoyed with the child, activities the family did as a group, music experiences, television viewing, pets, regular group experiences, play difficulties, travel, and imaginary playmates.

A fifth group of questions focused on behavior and development. These questions included usual methods of controlling the child, characteristics of maternal and paternal discipline, the usual reaction of the child to discipline, personality traits, behavior needing help, fears, unusual circumstances in the child's life, the child's reactions to those circumstances, and sex interest and instruction.

Data Collection

Each child enrolled in the Toddler-Two and Nursery School program at University of North Carolina, Greensboro, had an individual folder which included a copy of Your Child and His Development for each year the child was enrolled. Children were identified by examining each record for the appropriate year. The child's age on the date on which the record was completed was used for classification. Children who were 2, 3, or 4 years old were included. Twins were excluded, as was one child identified as mentally retarded.

The following variables were identified from each completed form:

1. Year in which form was completed
2. Sex of child
3. Age of child
4. Adoption
5. Age of adoption
6. Knowledge of adoption
7. Marital status of parents
8. Presence of step-parent
9. Parental age
10. Parental education (highest grade completed, major field of study)
11. Occupation
12. Extent of employment (full-time, part-time, full-time homemaker, ill or disabled)
13. Number of children in family
14. Ordinal position of subject
15. Child's self-help skills (specific skills and number of skills)
16. Family activities (specific activities and number of activities)
17. Respondent's perception of mother's and father's discipline
18. Reaction of child to discipline
19. Usual and most effective method of control
20. Personality characteristics
21. Fears reported by parent

22. Behavior needing help

23. Variables related to sexuality (interest in own body, notice of differences between boys and girls, and curiosity about where babies comes from)

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The analysis of the data was descriptive, utilizing means and percentages. When the possibility of differences between groups was suggested by the initial analysis, data were further analyzed using Chi-square. Data were analyzed from several perspectives.

1. The study population was classified by age, sex, and year of enrollment.

2. Characteristics of parents (marital status, age, education, area of study, socioeconomic status, employment outside the home) were identified and analyzed.

3. Characteristics of children (ordinal position in the family, self-help skills, personality characteristics, fears, behavior needing help, and sex interest) were identified and analyzed by year, sex, and age.

4. The number of family activities reported was identified and analyzed by year, sex, and age. One specific family activity, reading to the child, was further analyzed by "usual reader."

5. Information related to discipline was available from responses to several questions. These data include parents' methods of control, mother's discipline of child, father's discipline of child, and usual reaction of the child to discipline.

6. Self-help skills, family activities, personality characteristics, and usual and effective methods of control were analyzed by ordinal position of the child in the family and by maternal employment.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess parental perceptions of child characteristics and behavior at five-year intervals between 1963 and 1983. The form Your Child and His Development, used as the data base, had remained largely consistent in terms of the questions asked throughout these two decades and thus provided a unique opportunity to assess changes in parental perceptions that may have occurred during this time. It would have been interesting to ascertain whether the form had been completed by mother, father, or some other individual; there is no place on the form for the respondent to indicate a relationship to the child. Although the lack of this information in no way invalidates the findings, inclusion on the form in the future should provide additional useful information about the way in which mothers, fathers, and other persons perceive the child. The amount of time the respondent spent with the child (e.g., hours per day) would also be useful data.

While the questionnaire Your Child and His Development remained generally unchanged, there were slight variations in the questionnaires completed by the parents of some children. For example, questions about sex interest did not appear on the questionnaire in all years. When the data for these questions were analyzed, percentages reflected only those who had the opportunity to answer the question. Thus the number of responses is not consistent for all questions analyzed.

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CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data were collected from the record Your Child and His Development completed by the parents of 257 children enrolled in the Toddler Two and Nursery School programs at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, in the years 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978, and 1983. The years represent five-year intervals from 1983, with 1963 being the first year in which comparable data were available. Data for twins were excluded, as well as data for one child whose record indicated a degree of mental retardation. Otherwise, all available records from the years named above were examined. Table 5 describes the sample by age, sex and year of the child's enrollment. The total sample included 137 boys and 120 girls.

Characteristics of Parents and Families

The review of the literature suggested that characteristics of parents may affect their perception of their child. In this section findings about parental marital status, age, education, scores on the Socioeconomic Index for Occupations, employment outside the home, and family size are reviewed.

Marital status of parents. Information on marital status of parents was available for 256 of the 257 children (Table 6). Two hundred fifty-two parents (98.4%) were married, one was divorced, and three were widowed. There was no significant difference in marital status in the years sampled (Chi-square = 8.35, NS). There were no stepmothers and only three stepfathers represented in the data.

Table 5

Study Population by Age, Sex, and Year of Enrollment

Year	Sex	Male			Female			Total		
	Age	2	3	4	2	3	4	M	F	All
1963		5	10	10	5	6	10	25	21	46
1968		2	3	9	4	8	5	14	17	31
1973		11	13	15	7	8	10	39	25	64
1978		7	15	10	8	15	11	32	34	66
1983		10	7	10	7	8	8	27	23	50
Total		35	48	54	31	45	44	137	120	257

Table 6

Marital Status of Parents

Year	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Total
1963	46	0	0	46
1968	30	0	1	31
1973	60	1	2	63
1978	66	0	0	66
1983	50	0	0	50
	252 (98.4%)	1 (0.4%)	3 (1.2%)	256

Parental age. Information about parental age was available for 233 mothers and 231 fathers. The mean maternal age was 32.6; mean paternal age was 35.6. Only 27% of mothers and 12% of fathers were under the age of 30. Maternal age ranged from 24 to 49; paternal age ranged from 26 to 63. Four fathers were 50 years old or older (Table 7). There was no significant difference in either maternal or paternal age by year: Chi-square (mother's age) 81.3, NS; Chi-square (father's age) 104.2, NS.

Table 7

Mean Maternal and Paternal Age and Year

	Maternal age				Paternal age			
Year	N	Mean	Range	% < 30 years old	N	Mean	Range	% < 30 years old
1963	40	34.3	26-46	25	40	37.4	30-63	0
1968	26	33.0	25-46	31	24	35.6	26-48	17
1973	59	31.8	26-49	25	58	34.9	26-54	14
1978	59	32.3	24-43	29	59	34.9	28-52	15
1983	49	32.2	25-43	27	50	34.5	26-47	14
Total	233	32.6	24-46	27	231	35.6	26-63	12

Parental education. Data about level of educational attainment were available for 244 mothers and 238 fathers. All of the mothers and all but one of the fathers had completed high school. At least 16 years of education was completed by 75% of the mothers and 56% of the fathers. Table 8 summarizes level of educational attainment by year. Although the means for both groups were similar, only 11 mothers (4%) had completed 18 or more years of education whereas 64 fathers (27%) had completed 18 or more years.

Table 8

Mean Years of Education Completed by Year

	Mothers		Fathers	
Year	N	Mean	N	Mean
1963	45	15.4	43	16.6
1968	31	15.8	27	16.3
1973	60	15.8	60	16.8
1978	61	16.0	61	17.4
1983	47	15.7	47	16.4
Total	244	15.8	238	16.7

Information on major field of study was available for 228 mothers and 224 fathers. When individuals had an advanced degree, the major field studied for the advanced degree was recorded. The three major

fields of study which were reported most frequently in each year are summarized in Table 9. Beginning in the 1970's, social science became a frequent area of concentration for mothers, whereas home economics became less frequent. Education was the one consistent major ranking high for mothers in all years sampled. Social science was only recorded among the three most frequent major fields for fathers in 1973; business, chemistry, physics and engineering, and medicine were consistently the most frequent majors for fathers in this sample. Other fields of study for mothers were business (13), nursing (12), chemistry-physics-engineering (6) and biological science (5). Fathers also majored in the humanities (23), social science (21), law (13), education (9), music/fine arts (6) and home economics (4).

Socioeconomic Index for Occupations. Socioeconomic status was scored by Reiss' (1961) Socioeconomic Index for Occupations in the Detailed Classification of the Bureau of the Census. Developed from the work of North and Hatt (Hatt, 1950), this scale was designed for the purpose of converting occupation to an index of socioeconomic status. Median income levels and median levels of educational attainment have been found to be related to the general standing of an occupation (Reiss, p. 84). Occupations were ranked on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest ranking possible. Of 77 employed mothers for whom information was available, 44 (58%) scored 10. Examples of maternal occupations were teacher, dental hygienist, nurse, assistant library director, owner and operator of day-care home, physician, and college professor. Of 241 fathers, 183 (76%) scored 10. Examples of paternal occupations were statistician, credit manager, president of company,

Table 9

Parents' Most Frequent Area of Study by Year

(Percentage of Parents Reporting Major Field of Study)

	Mother			Father		
Year	Field	N	%	Field	N	%
1963	Fine arts	11	30.6	Business	10	26.3
	Home economics	6	16.7	Chemistry, physics,		
	Education	5	13.9	engineering	8	21.1
				Medicine	4	10.5
				Law	4	10.5
1968	Home economics	8	28.6	Chemistry, physics,		
	Education	7	25.0	engineering	8	32.0
	Humanities	4	14.3	Business	5	20.0
	Business	4	14.3	Medicine	2	8.0
				Law	2	8.0
1973	Humanities	10	16.7	Business	15	30.0
	Social science	10	16.7	Social science	9	18.0
	Home economics	9	15.0	Medicine	8	16.0
	Education	9	15.0			
1978	Education	17	29.8	Business	17	27.0
	Social science	12	21.1	Chemistry, physics,		
	Humanities	10	17.5	engineering	12	19.0
				Medicine	9	14.3
1983	Social science	9	19.1	Business	15	31.3
	Education	9	19.1	Chemistry, physics,		
	Humanities	7	14.9	engineering	7	14.6
				Humanities	7	14.6
Total	Education	47	20.6	Business	62	27.2
	Humanities	34	14.9	Chemistry, physics,		
	Home economics	31	13.6	engineering	40	17.9
				Medicine	25	11.2

physician, dentist, veterinarian, vice-president (insurance agency), truck driver, college professor, salesman and director of marketing. The Socioeconomic Index for Occupations does not have a classification for homemakers; therefore the number of mothers for whom occupations were classified was considerably less than the number of fathers. Table 10 summarizes Socioeconomic Index for Occupations for mothers and fathers of children in the current study.

Maternal employment outside the home. The majority of mothers of children in the current study (57%) were full-time homemakers even though the percentages for various types of employment changed over the years (Table 11). Although more mothers were employed after 1973 than had been in previous years, the increase was in part-time rather than full-time employment. In 1963, 13% of mothers were employed part-time outside the home; in 1983, 26.5% of mothers were so employed. Ninety-two percent of fathers were employed full-time outside of the home. One father was employed part-time and one father in 1973 characterized himself as full-time homemaker.

Family size. Family size decreased slightly from 1963 to 1983. In 1963 the families in the study population had an average of 2.3 children. The average was 2.4 in 1968; 2.0, in 1973, and 1.9, in both 1978 and 1983. The number of families with three or more children declined in each year studied, from 34.1% in 1963 to 20.8% in 1983. Although comparable data were not available for the specific years studied, the trend was the same as that in the United States as a whole (Figure 1).

Table 10

Socioeconomic Index for Occupations of Employed Parents by Year: Number and Percentage (Rounded)

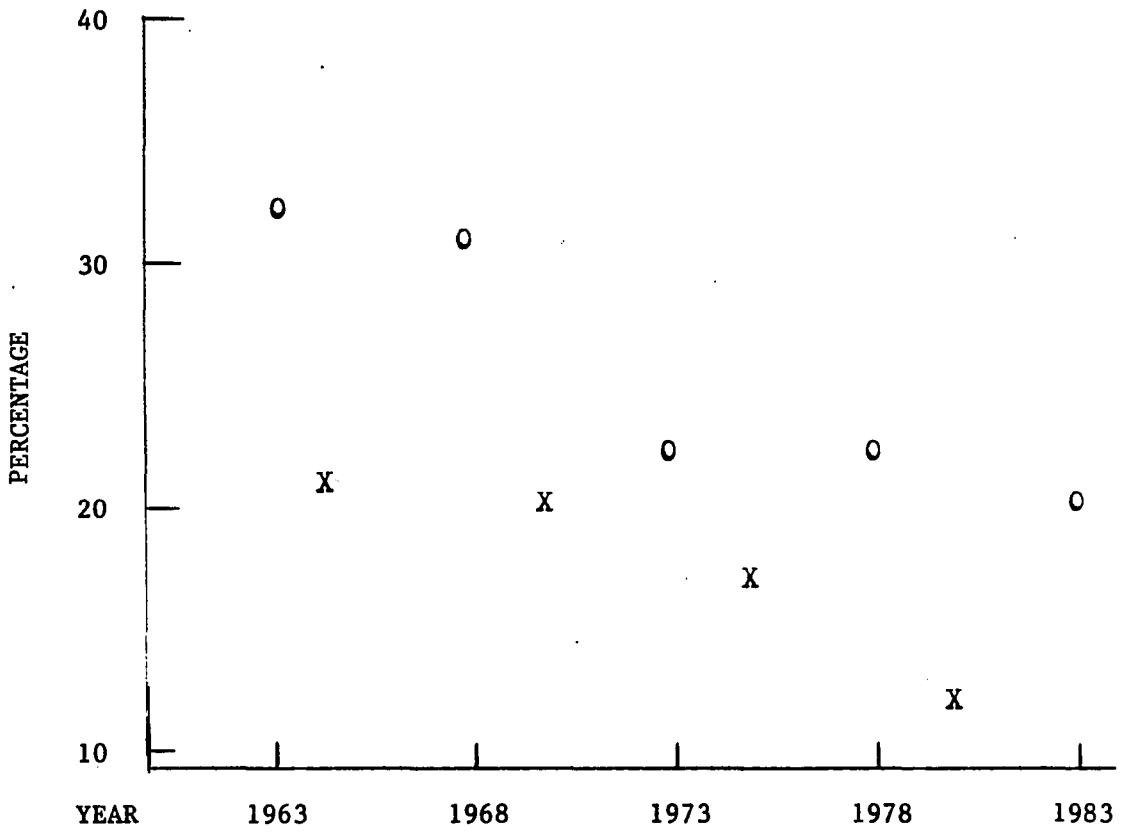
Year		Mothers										Fathers									
Classification		10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
1963	n =	8	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	34	10	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	% =	62	31								8	74	22	2	2						
1968	n =	5	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	% =	71	29									74	22	4							
1973	n =	13	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47	12	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
	% =	68	16	16								76	19	2				1.5			1.5
1978	n =	10	7	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	50	10	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
	% =	50	35	10	5							82	16			2					
1983	n =	8	2	6	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	32	9	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
	% =	44	11	22	6	6						71	20	4	2	2					
Total	n =	44	18	11	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	183	47	5	2	2	-	2	-	-	-
	% =	57	23	14	3	-	-	1	-	-	1	76	19	2	1	1	-	1	-	-	-

Table 11

Type of Employment: Mother, by Year (Percentage)

Year	N	Full-time outside home	Part-time outside home	Full-time homemaker	Part-time or full-time work at home	Retired	Full-time student	Deceased	Information not available
1963	46	13	13	63.0	4.3	-	2.2	-	4.3
1968	31	19.4	3.2	61.0	-	-	3.2	-	12.9
1973	64	9.5	17.5	50.8	1.6	3.2	4.8	1.6	11.1
1978	66	13.6	16.7	56.1	3.0	-	1.5	-	9.1
1983	50	10.2	26.5	57.1	-	-	4.1	-	2.0
All Years	257	12.5	16.5	56.9	2.0	0.8	3.1	0.4	7.8

FIGURE 1



O = Study Population: 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978, 1983

X = Population of United States: 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 (Source: Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1981, p. 46)

Percentage of Families with Three or More Children: Study Population (1963-1983) and United States (1965-1980)

As the data illustrated in Figure 1 also demonstrated, there was a greater percentage of families in the study who had three or more children than in the population of the United States.

Characteristics of Children

The principal focus of this study was the parent's description of certain characteristics and behavior of his/her child. In this section data on the following six factors are reviewed: ordinal position of the child in the family; self-help skills; personality characteristics of child as described by the parent; fears; behavior needing help; and sex interest.

Ordinal position of the child in the family. Data concerning ordinal position of the child in the family were available for 252 children. The percentage of children who were first children increased from 40.9 in 1963 to 55.1 in 1983. The number of children who were first or second children increased at each year sampled from 72.7 in 1963 to 81.6 in 1983. Table 12 summarizes these data. When the mean age of parents 32.6 years (mothers) and 35.6 (fathers) is compared with the age of the children (none over 4) and the ordinal position of the children (78% first or second order births), the data for each year suggested that childbearing in these families was delayed until the parents were in the late twenties or early thirties.

Self-help skills. In a section labeled "self-help," the parent was asked to circle those things which the child usually does himself in a list of 15 self-help skills. These skills were that the child dress himself, undress himself, wash face, wash hands, bathe himself, use toilet for urination, use toilet for bowel movement, put on wraps, take

off wraps, put clothes away, put toys away, lace shoes, brush teeth, comb hair, and tie shoes. In Table 13 the frequency of each response and the percentage of parents reporting each self-help skill are summarized.

Table 12

Ordinal Position of Child by Year (Percentage of Children at Each Ordinal Position)

		Ordinal position (percentage)					
Year	N	1	2	3	4	5	6
1963	46	40.9	31.8	13.6	11.4	2.3	-
1968	31	45.2	32.3	9.7	6.5	3.2	3.2
1973	64	52.4	27.0	14.3	6.3	-	-
1978	66	52.3	30.8	15.4	-	1.5	-
1983	50	55.1	26.5	12.2	6.1	-	-
Total	257	50.0	29.4	13.5	5.6	1.2	0.4

The mean number of self-help skills was 6.1; some 2-year-olds were described as having none of the skills. The mean number of self-help skills described was greater in girls than in boys at every year (Table 14). As might be expected, self-help skills increased as children grew older. Two-year-olds averaged 2.9 self-help skills, 3-year-olds averaged 6.4, and 4-year-olds averaged 8 (Table 15).

Table 13

Self-Help Skills: Frequency and Percentage in All Children

Self-help skill	N	% of sample
Urinate in toilet	199	77
Wash hands	196	76
Take off wraps	153	60
Toilet for bowel movement	152	59
Brush teeth	147	57
Undress self	123	48
Wash face	109	42
Put toys away	98	38
Put on wraps	88	34
Bathe self	82	32
Put clothes away	77	30
Comb hair	73	28
Dress self	68	27
Lace shoes	25	10
Tie shoes	13	5

Self-help skills were also examined in relation to maternal employment and the child's ordinal position in the family. Neither maternal employment nor ordinal position affected responses about self-help skills. Respondents reported a mean of 6.4 skills for

Table 14

Mean Self-Help Activities by Sex and Year

	Sex		
Year	Male	Female	Total
1963	4.7	6.8	5.7
1968	6.0	7.1	6.6
1973	4.4	5.9	5.0
1978	5.3	6.6	6.0
1983	2.8	9.2	8.0
Total	5.3	7.0	6.1

Table 15

Mean Self-Help Activities by Age and Year

	Age			
Year	2	3	4	Total
1963	1.8	5.6	7.6	5.7
1968	1.8	6.9	8.5	6.6
1973	2.4	5.1	6.7	5.0
1978	3.4	6.3	7.3	6.0
1983	4.2	8.9	10.8	8.0
Total	2.9	6.4	8.0	6.1

children with mothers employed full-time outside the home, 6.3 skills for part-time employed mothers, 5.7 skills when mothers were full-time homemakers, and 6.1 skills for other mothers (including those working at home or retired and full-time students). Employment data were available for 235 mothers.

When self-help skills were analyzed by the child's ordinal position in the family, the mean was 5.8 for first children, 5.6 for second children, and 5.5 for third children. Data on ordinal position were available for 252 children.

Characteristics of Child As Described by Parent

The parents completing the questionnaire had the opportunity to select as many adjectives as they felt appropriately described their children. The questionnaire said, "Circle all words which describe the child's usual personality behavior." A total of 1,907 adjectives were chosen by the 257 respondents, the mean being 7.4. Responses for all years are summarized in Table 16.

Of the 27 possible choices, 14 were selected by 20% or more of the parents. Characteristics chosen by fewer than 20% of the parents were "irritable," "lazy," "slow," "unstable" (not chosen at all), "timid," "self-conscious," "inattentive," "flighty," "antagonistic," and "suspicious." The 14 characteristics chosen by 20% or more the respondents were further examined in relation to the child's year of enrollment, age, and sex.

"Affectionate" was the characteristic most frequently chosen to describe girls in four out of five years selected (Table 17). "Happy" was the most frequently mentioned characteristic for boys in four of the

Table 16

Characteristics of Children As Described by Parents

	N	Percent
Irritable	7	2.7
Lazy	2	0.8
Slow	6	2.3
Unstable	0	0
Changeable	65	25.3
Shy	61	23.7
Timid	21	8.2
Self conscious	14	5.4
Inattentive	10	3.9
Flighty	4	1.6
Bossy	67	26.1
Aggressive	86	33.5
Stable	112	43.6
Calm	81	31.5
Self controlled	90	35.0
Well adjusted	169	65.8
Spoiled	32	12.5
Courageous	77	30.0
Cheerful	220	85.6
Trustful	165	64.2
Antagonistic	19	7.4
Suspicious	5	1.9
Whines	56	21.8
Becomes angry easily	43	16.7
Happy	223	86.8
Affectionate	226	87.9
Patient	49	19.1

five years (Table 17). Two-year-olds were most frequently described as "affectionate;" 3-year-olds, as "happy" and "affectionate;" and 4-year-olds, as "cheerful" (Table 18). All are very positive characteristics and are very different from the adjectives reported by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) and Hetherington et al. (1980) to describe children from divorced homes: "fearful," "bewilderment," "sadness," "regression," "disobedient," "aggressive," "whining," "demanding" and "unaffectionate." Although not all of the items cited by Wallerstein and Kelly and Hetherington et al. were on the checklist available to parents in the current study, a number of negative terms were included such as "irritable," "lazy," "slow," "unstable," "inattentive," "bossy," "aggressive," "antagonistic," "suspicious," "whines," "spoiled," and "becomes angry easily." Only "bossy," "aggressive" and "whines" were selected by 20% or more of the respondents. The use of part or all of the questionnaire Your Child and His Development with other populations with differing characteristics should lead to a better understanding of the relationship between parent characteristics and parents' perceptions of their children.

Analysis by sex and age focused on those characteristics mentioned by at least 20% of respondents. Of those characteristics, "bossy" and "whines" were least commonly chosen to describe boys, and "shy" was least commonly chosen to describe girls. "Shy" was also the characteristic least frequently chosen to describe both 2-year-olds and 4-year-olds; "bossy" was the least frequently mentioned by parents of 3-year-olds.

Table 17

Characteristics of Children As Described by Parents by Sex and Year (Percentage of All Children)

	Year	1963		1968		1973		1978		1983		Total	
	Sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Characteristics	N =	25	21	14	17	39	25	32	34	27	23	137	120
Changeable		40	33	21	14	26	32	34	26	3	12	26	25
Shy		28	14	29	10	31	32	16	21	15	36	23	24
Bossy		24	43	21	24	18	44	9	29	19	32	18	28
Aggressive		60	33	36	29	28	48	12	29	26	36	31	37
Stable		32	33	29	38	51	44	53	56	33	36	42	45
Calm		16	38	14	29	36	32	34	32	48	16	32	31
Self-controlled		32	29	29	24	41	24	28	38	52	36	37	33
Well adjusted		44	57	71	43	67	60	72	79	74	64	66	66
Courageous		44	33	36	24	21	36	41	9	37	24	34	25
Cheerful		92*	81	93	71*	74	80	84	91*	89	84	85	87
Trustful		56	67	79	57	69	76	53	59	63	60	63	66
Whines		20	19	14	19	15	32	25	29	11	24	18	27
Happy		92*	67	100*	62	87*	80	84	88	96*	88*	91*	83
Affectionate		88	86*	86	71*	87*	88*	88*	91*	85	84	87	89*

*Most frequent response.

Table 18

Characteristics of Children As Described by Parents by Age and Year (Percentage of All Children)

	Year	1963			1968			1973			1978			1983			Total		
	Age	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4
Characteristics	N =	10	16	20	6	11	14	18	21	25	15	30	21	17	15	18	66	93	98
Changeable		40	25	45	17	18	21	50	24	16	7	37	38	6	7	11	24	25	27
Shy		10	25	25	17	18	21	39	33	24	13	20	19	6	40	33	18	27	24
Bossy		50	19	35	17	18	36	28	24	32	27	13	24	18	40	22	27	22	30
Aggressive		70	38	45	33	55	21	50	38	24	13	27	19	35	33	28	39	35	28
Stable		30	25	40	33	55	29	39	48	56	73	50	48	29	33	44	42	43	45
Calm		20	25	30	17	36	21	17	48	36	47	30	29	47	33	22	32	34	29
Self-controlled		20	31	35	33	27	29	11	43	44	47	27	33	41	53	44	30	35	38
Well adjusted		60	44	50	66	64	57	39	86	64	100*	70	67	71	66	78	67	68	63
Courageous		60	31	35	50	27	29	6	33	36	27	27	19	35	27	33	30	29	31
Cheerful		90	75	95*	83	91*	93	50	76	96*	93	83	90*	82	87	100	77	82	95*
Trustful		30	81*	60	50	73	86	56	62	88	-	-	-	53	73	67	52	82	69
Whines		20	19	30	33	9	21	28	29	12	27	27	29	24	20	11	23	23	20
Happy		90	81*	75	83	73	100*	83*	81	88	93	87*	81	94*	93*	100*	89	84*	88
Affectionate		100*	81*	85	100*	73	93	78	90*	92	100*	87*	86	94*	80	89	92*	84*	89

*Most frequent response.

Child characteristics were further analyzed by maternal employment and the ordinal position of the child in the family. Whether the mother worked outside the home full-time or part-time, was a full-time homemaker, or was classified as "other" (a group including mothers who worked at home, were retired, or were students), the children were most frequently described as "happy," "affectionate" and "cheerful" (Table 19).

Of the characteristics chosen by 20% or more parents, the children of full-time employed mothers were least frequently described as "changeable," the children of part-time employed mothers were least frequently described as "bossy," and the children of full-time homemakers were least frequently described as "shy." As the data in Table 19 indicate, the adjectives used to describe children were quite consistent regardless of maternal employment.

Regardless of ordinal position in the family, children were most frequently described as "happy," "affectionate" or "cheerful" (Table 20). The characteristics mentioned least frequently of those traits selected by more than 20% of respondents were "shy" (first children), "bossy" (second children) and "whines" (third children).

Reported Fears

In response to the question "Does your child have any fears?" there were 235 responses: 99 said "no" (42%) and 136 "yes" (58%). When data from those respondents answering "yes" were analyzed for responses to an open-ended question about types of fears, thunder and lightening, animals and dogs, and dark predominated (Table 21). Numerous fears were mentioned by one or a few parents. These fears (and the number of times

Table 19

Effect of Maternal Employment on Description of Child Characteristics

Characteristics	Employment N =	Percentage of responses for each characteristic by maternal employment: Full-time outside home 32	Part-time outside home 42	Full-time homemaker 145	Other[1] 16
Changeable		13	19	28	19
Shy		19	24	24	31
Bossy		31	10	28	44
Aggressive		41	31	33	38
Stable		44	40	43	63
Calm		28	29	33	38
Self-controlled		15	21	31	50
Well-adjusted		69	74	64	63
Courageous		25	29	33	19
Cheerful		91	88	85	88*
Trustful		59	74	61	69
Whines		19	17	25	25
Happy		97*	91*	84	69
Affectionate		88	91*	88*	81

[1]Includes part-time or full-time at home (5), retired (2), full-time student (8), deceased (1).

Table 20

Effect of Ordinal Position on Description of Child Characteristics

Characteristics	Ordinal position	Percentage of responses for each characteristic by ordinal position of child		
		1	2	3 or more
	N =	126	74	52
Changeable		30	20	21
Shy		25	26	19
Bossy		32	14	31
Aggressive		38	23	37
Stable		41	47	42
Calm		26	39	33
Self-controlled		36	37	29
Well-adjusted		68	64	65
Courageous		25	26	48
Cheerful		82	88	92*
Trustful		65	58	67
Whines		29	19	10
Happy		87*	84	90
Affectionate		84	92*	92*

mentioned) included monsters (7), bad wolf (2), deep water (2), new experiences (3), being alone (2), doctor (2), strangers (3), bath (2), ghosts (2), vacuum (2), witches (2) and a single mention of masks, elevators, heights, clown, cars, V-shaped toilet seats, an imaginary cow in the basement, obese people, jack-in-the-box, swing, airplanes, being left behind, getting lost, the painter on Sesame Street, large vehicles, bath, witches, toy robot, and a haunted house.

Table 21

Types of Fears (Number of Times Mentioned)

	Total
Dark	29
Thunder/lightening	30
Loud noises, sirens	25
Animals, dogs	28
Bugs and snakes	13
Miscellaneous	52

The presence of fears as stated by parents of male and female children was compared to the total number of male and female children for each year (Table 22). Although the percentage of fears reported for males and females varied from year to year, the overall percentage of fears was the same for both sexes (53% for male children and 52.5% for female children).

Table 22

Percentage of Male and Female Children Reported to Have Fears, by Year

Year	Male % (N=137)	Female % (N=120)
1963	48	32
1968	35	50
1973	80	36
1978	56	56
1983	78	59
Total	53	52.5

The data, analyzed by age (Table 23), compared the presence of fears by age to the total number of children in that age group. Three-year-olds were reported to have slightly more fears than 2 and 4-year-olds did.

In both 3 and 4-year-old age groups, the percentage of children reported to have fears increased every year. In the 3-year-old group, 44% were reported to have fears in 1963; by 1983 the percentage increased to 87%. An even greater increase was evident in 4-year-olds, from 30% in 1963 to 67% in 1983 (Table 23).

Behavior Needing Help

Parents were asked to "circle any of the following items with which you feel you need help." Respondents made a choice from the 36 items in

Table 23

Percentage of Children Aged 2, 3, and 4 Reported to Have Fears, by Year

Year	Age 2 (N=66)	Age 3 (N=93)	Age 4 (N=98)
1963	50	44	30
1968	50	45	36
1973	61	57	44
1978	53	63	48
1983	53	87	67
Total	55	60	47

Table 24. Table 24 summarizes responses of all parents. Only two behaviors, thumbsucking and seeks attention, were mentioned by more than 10% of parents. Because the remaining responses were scattered among 36 different behaviors, with only a small number of responses for each behavior, the data were not analyzed by year, sex, and age.

Sex Interest

Three questions focused on the parent's perception of the child's interest in topics that are related to sexuality.

1. Has child shown any interest in his own body?

2. Has he noticed or asked about differences between boys and girls?

Table 24

Behaviors Needing Help: Number and Percentage of Parents Mentioning Each Behavior

	N	%
Thumbsucking	32	13
Fingersucking	10	4
Nail biting	10	4
Masturbation	5	2
Babytalk	15	6
Inability to eat solid foods	3	1
Speech defect	9	4
Poor articulation	24	9
Stuttering	5	2
Refusal to talk	11	4
Lying	1	0.4
Swearing	5	2
Destructive	13	5
Cruel to other children	3	1
Teases	21	8
Seeks attention	28	11
Selfish	16	6
Quarrelsome	7	3
Temper tantrums	20	8
Over-affectionate	2	1
Jealous	12	5
Eats dirt	5	2
Daydreams	0	0
Suspicious	1	0.4
Sensitiveness	22	7
Picks at body	10	4
Timidity	12	5
Lack of self confidence	8	3
Feelings of insecurity	4	2
Fighting	18	1
Submissiveness	2	0.8
Anxiety	3	1
Awkwardness	2	0.8
Nose picking	10	4
Twitching	0	0
Excitability	12	5

3. Has he asked "where babies come from?"

Not every parent had the opportunity to answer these questions because of variations in Your Child and His Development; these questions were not asked of all parents in all years. Thus the number of responses to this question was lower than the number for many other questions. This fact was particularly true of children in the Toddler Two program. Table 25 summarizes the data for the population. Tables 26 and 27 compare answers by year, sex, and age. Parents in 1963 perceived their children as less interested in their own bodies, as less likely to have noted differences between boys and girls, and as inquiring about babies less often than parents perceived in their children during the 1970's and 1980's. There was little difference between the answers of parents of boys and the parents of girls. As might be expected, as children grew older, they were reported to be more likely to notice the difference between boys and girls and to ask "where babies come from?"

Family Activities

Family activities were measured by responses to the question "Circle the activities jointly engaged in by members of the family and the child." A list of 18 activities followed: reading, listening to music, routines, hobbies, excursions to park or airport or railroad, marketing, nature walks, picnics, gardening and yard work, television, playing ball, drive-in movies, stories, cooking, helping with household duties, and riding. Family activities were not analyzed individually; the mean number of family activities was analyzed by sex for each year (Table 28). No differences were found for boys and girls. Mean family

activities were also analyzed by age (Table 29). Slightly more activities were reported from this list for 3 and 4-year-olds (means of 12.2 and 12.0) than for 2-year-olds (mean of 10.8). This finding may be due to the nature of some items on the list. Playing ball, cooking, hobbies, and helping with household duties are examples of activities which may be more easily engaged in by slightly older children. The difference is small, an average of slightly more than one activity per family.

Table 25

Sex Interest (Percentage of All Respondents)

	Response				No answer	
	Yes		no			
Item	N	%	N	%	N	%
Shown interest in own body?	181	70	43	17	33	13
Noticed differences between boys and girls?	138	54	76	30	43	18
Asked where babies comes from?	83	32	140	55	34	13

Family activities were examined in relation to the mother's employment. Averages of 12.7 family activities were reported for families in which the mother was employed full-time outside the home, 12.1 family activities when the mother was employed part-time outside

Table 26

Sex Interest by Sex and Year (Percentage[1] Answering "Yes")

	Year	1963		1968		1973		1978		1983		Total	
Item	Sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Interest in own body	N =	24	20	12	16	29	17	27	31	26	22	118	106
	% =	71	65	92	81	79	94	78	77	92	86	81	80
Noticed differences	N =	25	19	8	11	30	18	27	27	27	22	107	98
between boys and girls	% =	48	47	63	45	77	72	63	59	70	82	72	63
Asked where babies	N =	25	19	12	16	28	17	27	31	27	22	119	104
come from	% =	12	16	42	38	39	65	48	42	30	45	34	41

[1]The number of respondents varied slightly among questions. N = total number of respondents per question.

Table 27

Sex Interest by Age and Year (Percentage[1] Answering "Yes")

	Year	1963			1968			1973			1978			1983			Total		
Item	Age	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4
Interest in own body	N =	9	15	20	4	11	13	5	18	23	8	30	20	15	15	18	41	89	84
	% =	78	67	65	75	91	85	40	83	96	75	80	75	87	93	89	76	82	82
Noticed differences	N =	9	15	20	1	11	9	5	19	24	7	30	17	16	15	18	38	90	80
between boys and girls	% =	33	40	60	0	36	89	40	68	88	29	63	76	31	100	94	32	63	80
Asked where babies	N =	9	15	20	4	11	13	5	16	23	7	29	21	16	15	18	41	86	95
come from	% =	0	13	20	0	36	54	0	19	83	14	38	67	6	33	67	5	29	59

[1]The number of respondents varied slightly among questions. N = total number of respondents per question.

Table 28

Mean Family Activities by Sex and Year

Year	Sex: Male	Female	Total
1963	11.2	11.7	11.4
1968	8.8	12.5	10.8
1973	12.3	13.0	12.6
1978	12.5	11.3	11.9
1983	12.6	10.7	11.7
Total	11.8	11.8	11.8

Table 29

Mean Family Activities by Age and Year

Year	Age: 2	3	4	Total
1963	10.9	11.8	11.4	11.4
1968	10.0	10.3	11.6	10.8
1973	10.9	14.8	12.1	12.6
1978	9.8	11.6	12.9	11.9
1983	10.5	11.9	12.7	11.7
Total	10.8	12.2	12.0	11.8

the home, 9.9 activities when the mother was a full-time homemaker, and 10.3 activities for other families (mother employed at home, full-time or retired).

Family activities were also examined in relation to the ordinal position of the child in the family. The parents of first children reported an average of 11.9 activities, whereas parents of second children reported an average of 12.2 activities and parents of third children reported an average of 11.5 activities.

One specific family activity, reading to the child, was analyzed by "usual reader." Mothers were listed as the "usual reader" by 41% of respondents; both mother and father were circled in the second most frequent response. The third most frequent response, coded "other," was used when multiple answers were circled. The frequency of mother as the reader declined from 49% in 1963 to 36% in 1983, whereas the frequency of mother and father increased from 20% in 1963 to 34% in 1983 (Table 30).

Discipline

Respondents were asked to characterize both mother's discipline and father's discipline from one of the following choices: rigid, stern, reasonably firm, easy-going, very lax, or sometimes stern-sometimes lax.

Sixty percent of the parents responding characterized the mother's discipline as "reasonably firm;" the father's discipline was characterized as "reasonably firm" in 50% of responses. More fathers than mothers were characterized as "easy-going" (18% as compared to 11%). These data are summarized in Table 31.

Eighteen methods of control were listed and the parents had the opportunity to select as many of those methods as they usually used. The methods of control from which respondents could select were ignoring, isolating, scolding, threatening, depriving of pleasure,

spanking, bribing, coaxing, rewarding, praising, comparing unfavorably with others, offering choices, suggesting, reasoning, demonstrating, diverting, preparing the child in advance, and speaking in a firm voice. Parents of 180 children could also star those methods which they felt to be most effective. Table 32 identifies the percentage of parents using each method of control. Parents chose a mean of 9.3 methods of control. Eleven methods of control were used by more than 25% of parents; those methods were further examined by sex of child, age of child, and year of response (Tables 33 and 34). Data summarizing responses about most effective methods of control are summarized in Tables 35, 36, and 37. Parents could choose as many "most effective" methods as they wished. While "speaking in a firm voice" was reported to be the most frequent method of control, "praising" was reported to be the most effective method. "Praising" was the second most frequently reported method. Neither sex nor age was important in the usual method of control. The most effective method of control was reported to be "preparing in advance" for boys and "praising" for girls. "Praising" and "diverting" were reported equally effective for 2-year-olds; "preparing in advance" was most effective for 3-year-olds whereas praising was most effective for 4-year-olds.

"Usual" and "most effective" methods of control were further analyzed by ordinal position of the child in the family and by maternal employment. Whether the child was a first child, a second child, or a third or higher order child, "speaking in a firm voice" was reported most frequently to be the usual method of control; "praising" was a close second for first and second children, and it tied with "speaking

in a firm voice" for third and higher order children. Of the methods examined by ordinal position, "threatening" was reported least frequently by all respondents (Table 38).

Table 30

Who Usually Reads to Child? (Percentage of Responses Rounded to Nearest Whole)

Year	Mother	Mother and father	Other	Father	Sibling	Grandmother	Babysitter
1963	49	20	20	5	5	2	0
1968	52	28	20	5	0	0	0
1973	46	29	12	7	0	4	2
1978	39	36	16	6	1	0	3
1983	36	34	24	6	0	0	0
Total	41	28	18	6	1	1	1

The method of control reported as most effective did vary with ordinal position. Parents of first children reported "preparing the children in advance" most effective; parents of second children reported "suggesting" as most effective; parents of a child who was the third or higher order child reported "praising" as most effective (Table 39).

Table 31

Characteristic Discipline: Mothers and Fathers by Year

	N		Rigid (%)		Stern (%)		Reasonably firm (%)	
Year	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
1963	44	46	-	2	2	13	66	48
1968	28	28	-	-	-	7	57	50
1973	59	63	-	-	2	5	73	61
1978	62	63	-	-	2	2	56	54
1983	49	49	-	-	1	10	61	39
Total	242	249	-	0.4	2	7	60	50

	Easy going (%)		Very lax (%)		Sometimes lax/ sometimes stern (%)		Combination[1] (%)	
Year	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
1963	14	13	-	2	18	17	-	4
1968	14	18	4	11	14	11	11	4
1973	14	17	-	-	8	11	5	5
1978	13	17	-	-	15	13	13	14
1983	10	24	-	2	6	8	20	16
Total	12	18	0.4	5	11	12	9	9

[1]More than one response circled.

Table 32

Usual Method of Control

	N	Percentage of parents using method
Ignoring	100	39
Isolating	153	60
Scolding	139	54
Threatening	69	27
Depriving of pleasure	93	36
Spanking	141	55
Bribing	38	15
Coaxing	58	23
Rewarding	130	51
Praising	217	84
Comparing unfavorably with others	6	2
Offering choices	191	74
Suggesting	181	70
Reasoning	172	67
Demonstrating	108	42
Diverting	169	66
Preparing child in advance	199	77
Speaking in a firm voice	223	87

Table 33

Usual Method of Control by Sex and Year

Method	Year	1963		1968		1973		1978		1983		Total	
	Sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	N =	25	21	14	17	39	25	32	34	27	23	137	120
Isolating		56	57	57	29	59	72	63	71	56	61	58	61
Scolding		64	67	57	35	51	64	53	41	56	57	55	53
Spanking		44	81	86	41	56	64	41	32	52	48	53	52
Rewarding		36	38	29	29	38	64	66	53	56	83	51	55
Praising		80*	81	71	88*	82	96	84	85*	93*	78	83	86
Offering choices		68	52	50	76	72	84	81	76	78	91	72	77
Suggesting		60	67	64	53	77	88	56	74	78	78	68	73
Reasoning		60	52	57	59	62	88	75	74	67	65	65	69
Diverting		56	62	64	76	72	64	72	62	67	61	67	64
Preparing in advance		65	57	71	65	77	92	88*	82	78	87	77	78
Speaking in a firm voice		76	86*	93*	88*	90*	96*	81	79	89	96*	85*	88*

*Most frequent method.

Table 34

Usual Method of Control by Age and Year

Method	Year	1963			1968			1973			1978			1983			Total		
	Age	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4
	N =	10	16	20	6	11	14	18	21	25	15	30	21	17	15	18	66	93	98
Isolating		70	44	60	33	36	50	56	76	60	53	67	76	53	60	63	53	60	63
Scolding		90	63	55	33	45	50	72	48	52	13	53	62	55	56	52	55	56	52
Spanking		90	81	65	33	45	86*	67	62	52	27	30	52	55	52	58	55	52	58
Rewarding		50	19	45	33	18	36	67	38	44	53	67	52	44	46	49	44	46	49
Praising		70	94*	75*	100*	64	86*	94	86	84	87*	87	81	88	85*	83	88	85	83
Offering choices		70	56	60	50	64	71	61	95*	72	80	77	81	68	78	74	68	78	74
Suggesting		70	69	55	33	55	71	61	86	92*	67	63	67	65	71	73	65	71	73
Reasoning		40	50	70	33	55	71	56	71	84	73	67	86*	58	66	74	58	66	74
Diverting		70	56	55	83	82	57	78	67	64	73	67	62	73	62	64	73	62	64
Preparing in advance		60	63	60	50	55	86*	72	90	84	80	93*	76	71	81	79	71	81	79
Speaking in a firm voice		100*	81	70	83	100*	86*	100*	86	92*	73	80	86*	91*	85*	85*	91*	86*	85*

*Most frequent method.

Table 35

Effective Methods of Control

Method	Number of times mentioned	Percentage of parents responding to question (N=180)
Ignore	17	9
Isolate	58	32
Scold	9	5
Threaten	4	2
Deprive of pleasure	19	11
Spank	27	15
Bribe	8	4
Coax	3	2
Reward	27	15
Praise	72*	40*
Compare	2	1
Choices	56	31
Suggest	18	10
Reason	35	19
Demonstrate	18	10
Divert	45	25
Prepare in advance	69	38
Speak in firm voice	62	34

*Most frequent response.

Table 36

Effective Methods of Control by Sex and Year (Number of Responses)

Method	Year	1963		1968		1973		1978		1983		Total	
	Age	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	N = (Responding)	19	19	10	12	35	24	19	20	15	7	98	82
Isolating		8	4	2	1	12	8	7	10	4	2	32 (33%)	26 (32%)
Scolding		1	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	1	5 (5%)	4 (5%)
Spanking		5	1	3	3	7	4	2	0	2	0	19 (19%)	8 (10%)
Rewarding		0	0	4	0	6	5	7	3	1	0	19 (19%)	8 (10%)
Praising		11	3	5	9	10	10	11	9	3	1	40 (41%)	32* (39%)
Offering choices		6	2	3	5	12	8	9	6	2	3	32 (33%)	24 (29%)
Suggesting		2	2	1	5	2	2	3	1	0	0	8 (8%)	10 (12%)
Reasoning		3	2	3	4	4	7	5	1	4	2	19 (19%)	16 (20%)
Diverting		6	4	2	6	12	5	3	6	1	0	24 (24%)	21 (26%)
Preparing in advance		8	6	2	4	17	13	14	3	2	0	43* (44%)	26 (32%)
Speaking in a firm voice		11	5	2	6	14	5	4	7	4	3	35 (36%)	26 (32%)

*Most frequent response.

Table 37

Effective Methods of Control by Age and Year (Number of Responses)

Method	Year	1963			1968			1973			1978			1983		Total		
	Age	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	3	4	2	3	4
	N = (Responding)	10	13	15	5	8	9	18	21	20	9	13	17	9	13	42	64	74
Isolating		2	6	4	1	0	2	5	9	6	4	6	7	3	3	12 (29%)	24 (38%)	22 (30%)
Scolding		1	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	2 (5%)	5 (8%)	2 (3%)
Spanking		2	2	2	0	2	4	4	3	4	0	1	1	2	0	6 (14%)	10 (16%)	11 (15%)
Rewarding		0	0	1	1	1	2	3	4	4	2	3	5	0	1	6 (14%)	8 (13%)	13 (18%)
Praising		2	7	5	4	5	5	7	2	11	5	8	7	2	2	18* (43%)	24 (38%)	30* (41%)
Offering choices		1	4	3	1	3	4	7	8	5	5	5	5	0	5	14 (33%)	20 (31%)	22 (30%)
Suggesting		1	1	2	1	3	2	0	3	1	1	0	3	0	0	3 (7%)	7 (11%)	8 (11%)
Reasoning		0	2	3	1	3	3	0	3	8	0	2	4	2	4	1 (2%)	12 (19%)	22 (30%)
Diverting		5	3	2	4	4	0	6	7	4	3	3	3	1	0	18* (43%)	18 (28%)	9 (12%)
Preparing in advance		3	5	6	2	2	2	8	14	8	3	9	5	1	1	16 (38%)	31* (48%)	22 (30%)
Speaking in a firm voice		5	8	3	2	3	3	5	8	6	3	4	5	5	2	15 (36%)	28 (44%)	19 (26%)

*Most frequent response.

Table 38

Effect of Ordinal Position on Usual Method of Control

Method	Percentage of parents reporting each method by ordinal position of child		
Ordinal position	1	2	3 or above
N =	126	74	52
Ignoring	40	39	40
Isolating	64	55	58
Scolding	55	54	52
Threatening	29	26	25
Depriving of pleasure	34	39	56
Spanking	61	45	52
Rewarding	56	49	40
Praising	85	87	79*
Offering choices	80	80	54
Suggesting	69	72	69
Reasoning	75	63	54
Demonstrating	47	42	29
Diverting	68	65	63
Preparing child in advance	80	73	77
Speaking in a firm voice	89*	88*	79*

*Most frequent response.

Table 39

Effect of Ordinal Position on Effective Method of Control

Method	Percentage of responses for each method by ordinal position of child		
Ordinal position	1	2	3 or above
N =	126	74	52
Ignoring	4	10	8
Isolating	25	23	15
Scolding	3	3	6
Threatening	2	3	0
Depriving of pleasure	9	7	6
Spanking	13	8	10
Rewarding	11	10	8
Praising	28	30	23*
Offering choices	27	22	12
Suggesting	33	44*	8
Reasoning	14	15	13
Demonstrating	6	11	6
Diverting	21	18	10
Preparing child in advance	34*	26	12
Speaking in a firm voice	25	27	17

*Most frequent response.

The type of maternal employment did not affect responses about usual method of control. The most frequent response, regardless of the mother's employment (full-time outside the home, part-time outside the home, full-time homemaker, or a fourth group which included mothers employed at home or retired and full-time students) was "speaking in a firm voice" (Table 40). Although "speaking in a firm voice" was the usual method of control, it was not cited as the most effective method. For respondents from families in which the mother worked full-time outside the home or was a full-time homemaker, "praising" was cited as most effective. Respondents of families in which the mother worked part-time outside the home cited "offering choices" and isolating" equally as most effective, while respondents from the fourth group reported "preparing the child in advance" to be most effective (Table 41).

Response to Discipline

The usual reaction of the child to discipline was elicited by asking parents to circle any of nine responses: "afraid," "defiant," "sorry," "sulks," "cries," "temper tantrums," "indifferent," "more obedient," "regards as a joke." Many parents circled multiple answers. All responses are summarized in Table 42. Four responses, "defiant," "sorry," "cries" and "more obedient" were circled by more than 25% of parents. These four responses were further analyzed by year, sex, and age of child (Tables 43 and 44). Boys were reported to be slightly more likely to be "more obedient," whereas girls were reported to be slightly more likely to cry. Two and 3-year-olds were reported most frequently to cry and 4-year-olds were most likely to be "more obedient."

Table 40

Effect of Maternal Employment on Usual Method of Control

Method	Employment	Percentage of responses for each method by maternal employment			
		Full-time outside	Part-time outside	Full-time	
	N =	home 32	home 42	homemaker 145	Other[1] 16
Ignoring		53	26	41	38
Isolating		50	64	59	75
Scolding		59	64	50	50
Threatening		16	24	29	25
Depriving of pleasure		34	43	36	38
Spanking		56	55	55	69
Rewarding		41	62	51	50
Praising		78	88	85*	75
Offering choices		81	83	68	81
Suggesting		69	74	68	81
Reasoning		75	74	63	75
Demonstrating		38	52	39	44
Diverting		69	74	66	31
Preparing child in advance		75	86	75	69
Speaking in a firm voice		94*	93*	81	86*

[1]Includes part-time or full-time at home (5), retired (2), full-time student (8), deceased (1).

*Most frequent method.

Table 41

Effect of Maternal Employment on Effective Method of Control

Method	Employment N =	Percentage of responses for each method by maternal employment: Full-time outside home 32	Part-time outside home 42	Full-time homemaker 145	Other[1] 16
Ignoring		6	5	7	13
Isolating		16	31*	22	31
Scolding		3	0	4	6
Threatening		0	0	0.7	6
Depriving of pleasure		9	7	7	12
Spanking		16	7	10	6
Rewarding		9	19	8	6
Praising		34*	21	30*	19
Offering choices		28	31*	17	25
Suggesting		9	5	6	12
Reasoning		12	14	14	12
Demonstrating		9	5	8	6
Diverting		22	12	20	6
Preparing child in advance		31	19	25	44*
Speaking in a firm voice		31	29	21	25

[1]Includes part-time or full-time at home (5), retired (2), full-time student (8), deceased (1).

*Most frequent method.

Table 42

Response to Discipline

Response	N	%
Afraid	10	4
Defiant	66	26
Sorry	78	30
Sulks	49	19
Cries	151	59
Temper tantrums	35	14
Indifferent	19	7
More obedient	153	60
Regards as joke	12	5

Table 43

Response to Discipline by Sex and Year

Year	1963		1968		1973		1978		1983		Total	
Response / Sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
N =	25	21	14	17	39	25	32	34	27	23	137	120
Defiant	40	19	29	14	21	40	22	18	33	20	28	33
Sorry	32	19	29	29	33	64*	28	29	26	36	30	31
Cries	72*	71*	71*	33	44	64*	63*	56*	41	64*	57	61*
More obedient	60	62	50	57*	64*	60	56	47	74*	64*	62*	57

*Most frequent response.

Table 44

Response to Discipline by Age and Year

Year	1963			1968			1973			1978			1983			Total		
Response / Age	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4
N =	10	16	20	6	11	14	18	21	25	15	30	21	17	15	18	66	93	98
Defiant	30	19	40	50*	0	29	28	24	32	13	20	24	24	20	39	26	18	33
Sorry	20	38	20	17	9	57	17	38	40	20	37	24	24	53	22	20	37	32
Cries	100*	56	70*	50*	73*	43	61*	57	48	53*	67*	52	35	80*	50	58*	66*	53
More obedient	40	69*	65	50*	64	64*	50	67*	68*	53*	43	62*	65*	67	61*	53	59	64*

*Most frequent response.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

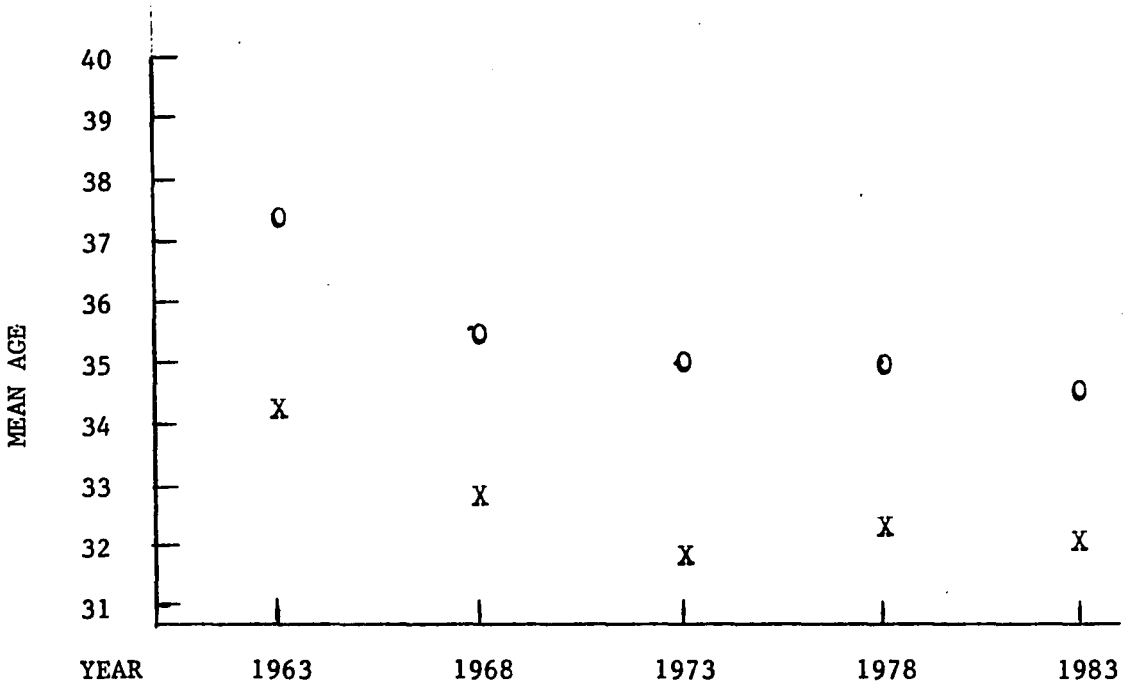
The purpose of this study was to explore factors which may have affected parental perception of children in the study sample, specifically parental characteristics, year of the child's enrollment, the child's sex and age, maternal employment, and the ordinal position of the child in the family. Each of these factors will be discussed in this chapter.

Characteristics of Parents

In contrast to the changes in the families in the United States and in North Carolina, characteristics of the families in this study have changed very little in the decades between 1963 and 1983. Over 98% of parents were married. No mothers were reported being stepmothers and only three fathers (1.2%) were reported as stepfathers. Only one parent in the study was divorced.

The low incidence of divorce could have been related to parental age at marriage. Although data on age at marriage were not available, the mean age of mothers at each study year was over 30 and of fathers nearly 35 (Figure 2). In this study, mothers and fathers had, on the average, four years of post-high-school education. These facts suggest that probably few of these parents were married as teenagers, a group with high divorce rates. Divorce rates were inversely correlated with age at marriage in several studies (Reiss, 1976; Belsky, Lerner, & Spanier, 1984). In addition, social class has been associated with age

FIGURE 2



0 = Mean maternal age

X = Mean paternal age

Mean Maternal and Paternal Age and Year of Child's Enrollment

at marriage. Goode (1956) suggested that because well-educated professionals are more likely to have fewer economic problems, stable employment, some control over their family time, and the ability to fulfill cultural expectations, they are less likely to divorce. This description fits the study population well. Nearly three decades later Belsky, Lerner and Spanier (1984) continued to cite the inverse relationship between educational levels, social class, and divorce. In an exchange perspective, the rewards of marriage for the study sample would appear to exceed the costs of divorce. Socioeconomic status was high. Eighty percent of mothers who were employed and 95% of fathers who were employed ranked 9 or 10 on Reiss' Socioeconomic Index for Occupations.

Increased maternal employment outside the home reflected the national trend. In 1963 26% of mothers in the study population were employed outside the home, 13% full-time and 13% part-time. In 1983, 36.7% were employed outside the home, 10.2% full-time and 26.5% part-time (Table 11). In the United States, 30.3% of women who were married with husband present and who were mothers of children under age six were employed in 1970, whereas 45% were employed in 1980. The overall increase in employment of 10.7% in the study sample is slightly less than an increase of 14.7% among married women across the United States. In the study sample, the increase in employment was in part-time employment. There was a slight decrease in the number of mothers employed full-time outside the home from 13% in 1963 to 10.2% in 1983.

In every year sampled, 50% or more of the mothers were full-time homemakers; the highest incidence of full-time employment was 13.6% in 1978. Both mothers and fathers were well educated; both men and women

at each interval predominantly chose fields of study usually considered sex-traditional. Mothers majored in home economics, education, fine arts, humanities, and social science. The most frequent major fields for fathers were business, fields related to physical science (chemistry, physics, and engineering), and medicine.

Family size, as measured by the percentage of families with three or more children, declined in the study population as it did in the United States during the period from 1963 to 1983. In the study sample 34.1% of the families had three or more children in 1963, whereas 20.8% of the families had three or more children in 1983. A greater percentage of families in the study sample than in the United States population had three or more children. This comparison was illustrated in Figure 1, Chapter IV. The mean number of children per family in the study sample declined from 2.3 in 1963 to 1.9 in 1983.

Year of Enrollment and Parental Perceptions

Examination of the data on parental descriptions of their children revealed remarkable consistency over the two decades between 1963 and 1983. In each year studied children were described in positive terms; "cheerful," "happy" and "affectionate" were the adjectives most frequently selected. The total number of family activities such as reading, listening to music, excursions to the park, marketing, and picnics was consistent in the data for each year studied. Parental reports of the child's interest in his own body, in the difference between boys and girls and in "where babies come from" was lower in 1963 for each question than in any subsequent year studied, but there was no consistent pattern in subsequent years.

The small changes (none in parental responses) over time could have been related to several factors. First, parents learn much about parenting (which would include discipline and family activities, for example) from the way in which they themselves were nurtured. Thus, styles in parenting would tend to change rather slowly. This fact would seem particularly likely in the study population, where factors such as marital status, level of educational attainment, and occupational status were remarkably alike in each year surveyed. The consistency in parent characteristics thus may be a factor in the consistency of many parent responses.

The consistency in parent variables (intact family, well-educated, high rank in the Socioeconomic Index for Occupations) could also explain the very positive responses of parents concerning the nature of their child's characteristics and behavior. In a study of observed maternal behavior, Conger, McCarty, Yang, Lahey and Burgess (1984) suggested five variables which they believed were indicative of high parental stress: family income below median, public assistance, one-parent family, number of children above the median, and education below this median of their sample. There was an inverse relationship between scores on the chronic-stress index developed from these five variables and a mother's positive affect toward her child, a measure developed from the Social Interaction Scoring System. Conger (1981) suggested that stressful environmental conditions may lead to negative self-perception and subsequently to negative parental behaviors. Research concerning children in divorced families, reviewed in Chapter II, suggested a much more negative perception of children than were the perceptions of

parents in the current study. The work of Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1978) provides a particularly interesting contrast because the children in the Hetherington study were white and middle class and attending nursery school. Hetherington et al. found that divorced parents were less affectionate, made fewer maturity demands, and were less consistent in discipline and control. In addition, the divorced parents perceived their children to be more dependent, disobedient, aggressive, whining, demanding, and unaffectionate than children were perceived in the intact family, clearly a picture far different from that presented by parents in the current study in which "happy," "affectionate," "cheerful," "well-adjusted," and "trustful" were the only characteristics mentioned by more than 50% of parents (refer back to Table 16, Chapter IV).

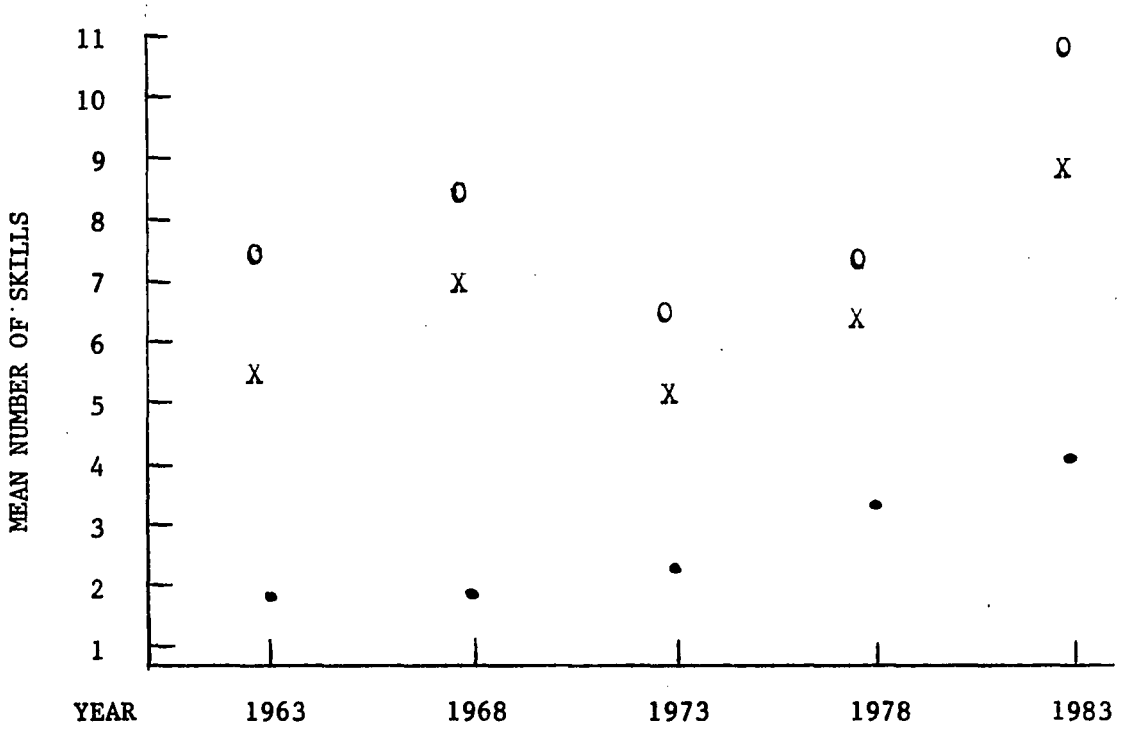
The work of Conger et al. (1984) suggested another possible factor, maternal age, in explaining the positive perception of the parents in this study. Conger and his associates found that the mother's age at the birth of her first child was positively associated with supportive maternal behaviors such as praise and physical affection and negatively related to aversive interactions, criticism, and physical punishment. Although this age could not be derived directly from the data collected, an approximation could be estimated. The mean age of all mothers in the sample was 32.6 years, with the range from 24 to 49 years. There was no mother under the age of 24. At least 16 years of education was completed by 75% of mothers. Eighty percent of children were either first or second children, and all child subjects were from 2 to 4 years of age. These figures suggested that childbearing was delayed until the mid-to-late twenties or early thirties for most mothers in the study, in

comparison with the median in the United States of 22.5 years (Wilkie, 1981). When the data in this study for usual method of control were analyzed, the most frequent methods of control were "speaking in a firm voice" (87% of parents), "praising" (84%), "preparing the child in advance" (77%), "offering choices" (74%) and "suggesting" (70%). In contrast, interactions which could be considered aversive were mentioned far less often. Only six parents (2%) cited "comparing unfavorably with others" as a usual method of control; other methods cited less frequently were "bribing" (15% of parents), "coaxing" (23%) and "threatening" (27%). Over three times more parents mentioned "praising" as a usual method of control than those who mentioned "threatening."

Changes Related to Year of Enrollment

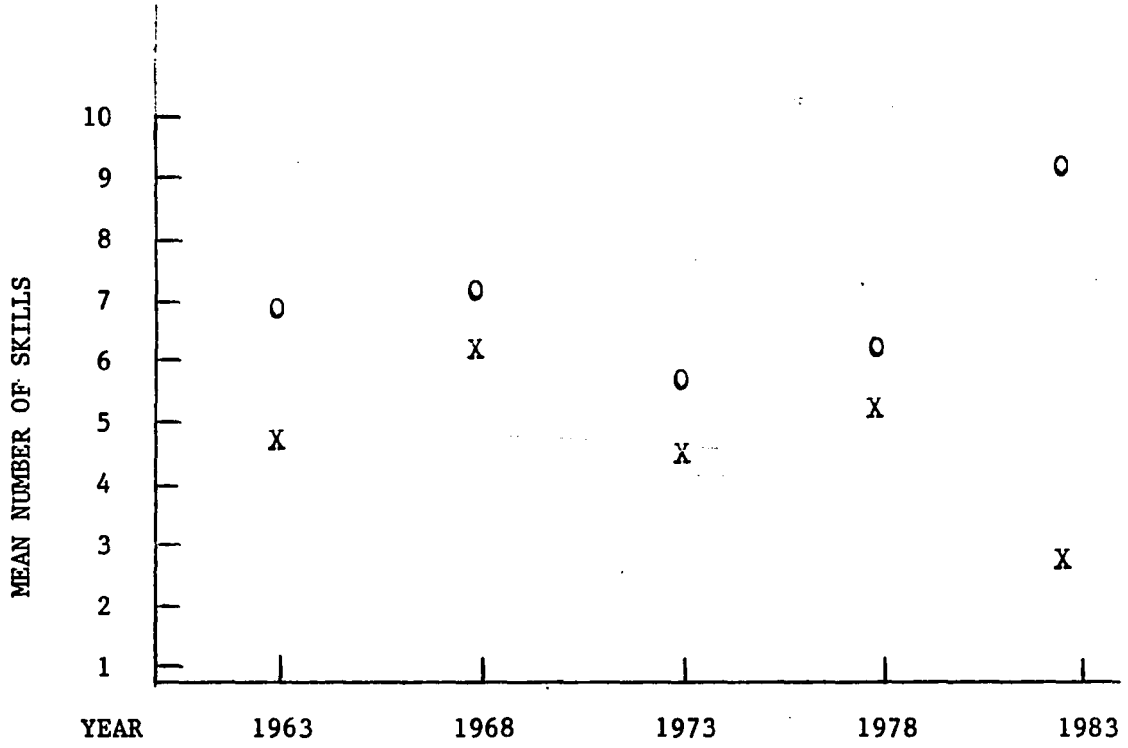
Self-help skills. The mean of self-help activities (8.0) was increased in 1983 over any other years sampled, the mean for all years being 6.1. As Figure 3 demonstrated, the increase was evident for all age groups; it was the increase in mean self-help skills reported for girls that accounted for the overall increase; the mean number of skills reported for boys decreased in 1983 (see Figure 4). For the total sample, however, the correlation between year of enrollment and total number of self-help skills was low ($n = .154$). It would be important to evaluate data from 1982, the year previous, and 1984, the subsequent year, to see if this change is a chance occurrence or if it does truly reflect a trend. Because of the small number of subjects in a single year (27 boys and 23 girls in 1983) a moving average combining data from three consecutive years might provide a more accurate picture of a potential trend.

FIGURE 3



Mean Self-Help Skills, Child's Age and Year of Child's Enrollment

FIGURE 4



Mean Self-Help Skills, Child's Sex and Year of Child's Enrollment

"Who reads to the child?". The incidence of mother as "usual reader" decreased from 49% in 1963 to 36% in 1983 while the frequency of both mother and father increased from 20% in 1963 to 34% in 1983. This change, which is evident at every five-year interval (Figure 5), may reflect an increasing participation of fathers in the care of small children in the 1980's as compared to their participation in the 1960's. In comparison, fathers in the 1980's are more likely to have attended childbirth preparation classes with their wives, to have been present at the birth of their infant, and to have had early contact with their child than did fathers in the 1960's. It is not surprising that they may also be more likely to participate in an activity such as reading to the child.

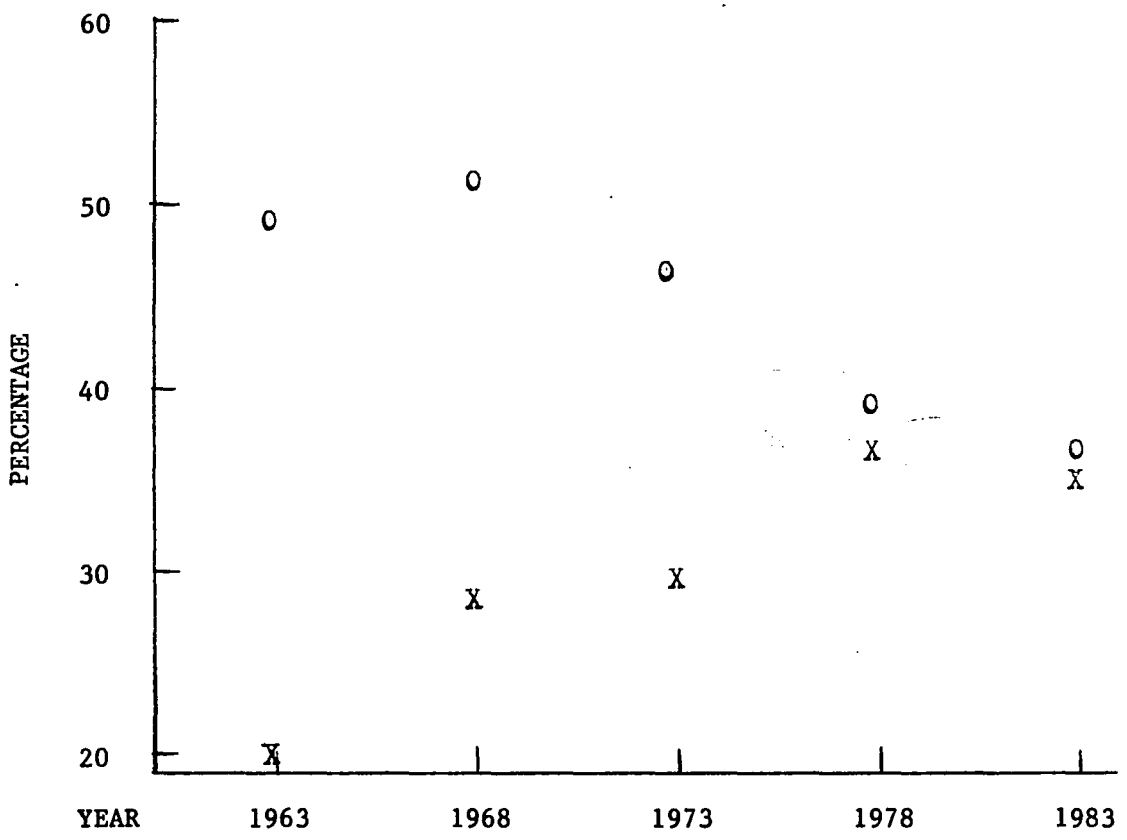
Reported fears. A change by year of enrollment in the percentage of parents reporting that their children had fears was evidence for 3 and 4-year-olds when the data were examined in relation to the age of the child (Figure 6) but was not present when the data were analyzed by sex of the child (Figure 7).

This increase by age was consistent in each year sampled for three and four years but was not statistically significant (Chi-square = 2.74, df = 8, NS) for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds nor for 3- and 4-year-olds alone (Chi-square = 8.24, df = 4, NS). Because the data for 3- and 4-year-olds approached significance at the .05 level, this trend in an increased number of reported fears deserves further attention.

Sex of the Child and Parental Perceptions

The differentiated perceptions of parents about their sons and daughters, even as early as the first day of the child's life (Rubin,

FIGURE 5

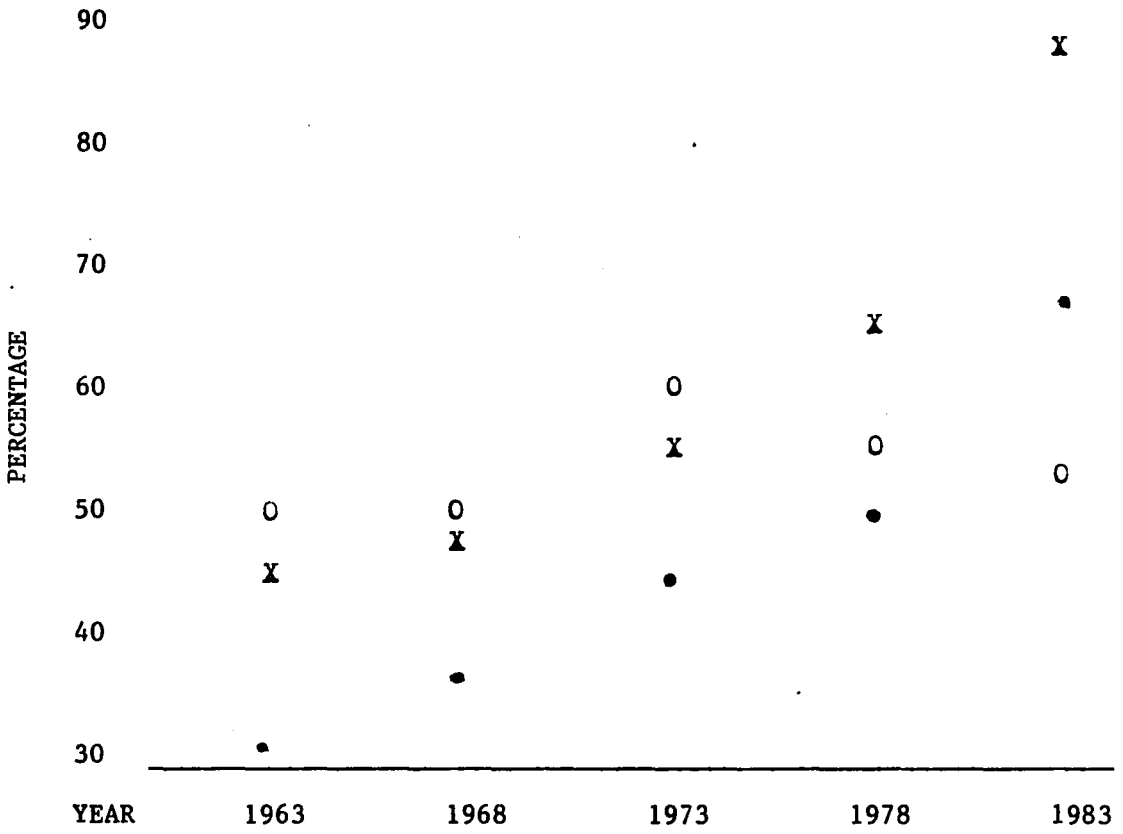


0 = Mother

X = Mother and father

Responses to "Who Usually Reads to the Child?" by Year of Child's Enrollment

FIGURE 6



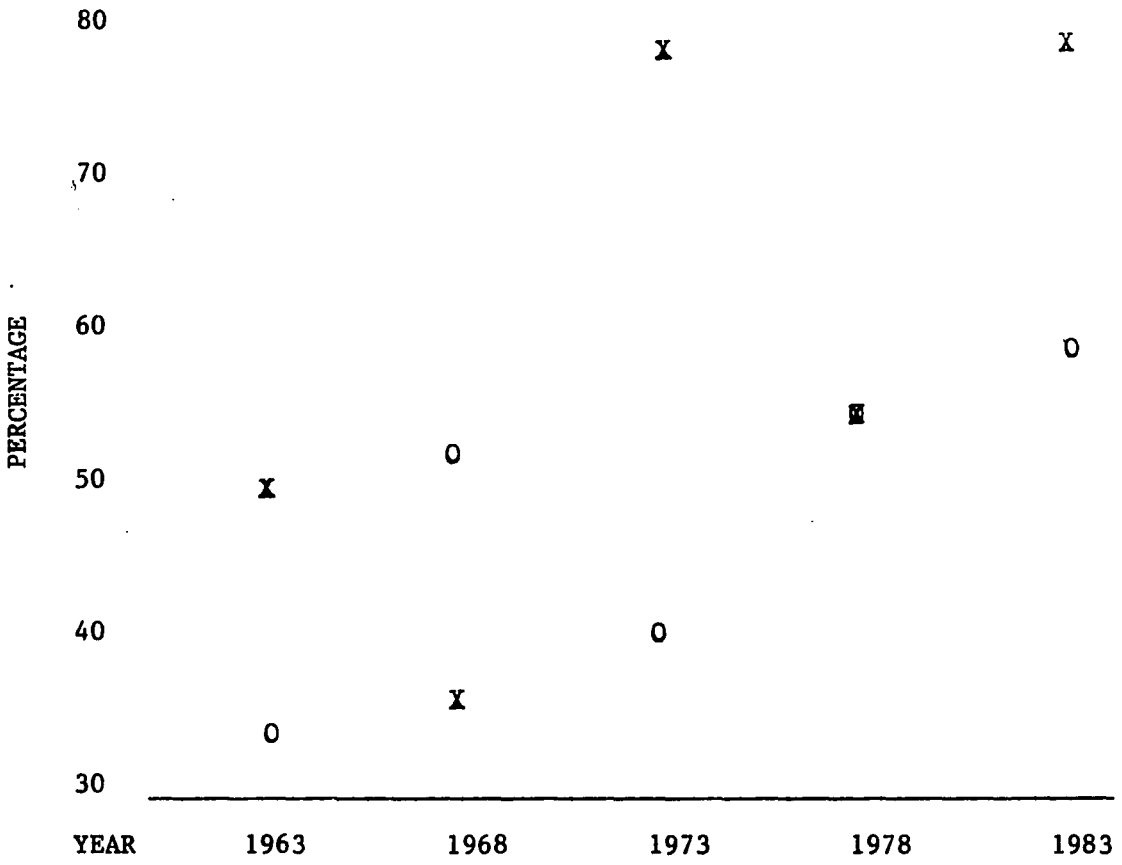
0 = 2-year-old

X = 3-year-old

• = 4-year-old

Percentage of Parents Reporting Child Fears, by Age and Year of Child's Enrollment

FIGURE 7



Percentage of Parents Reporting Child Fears, by Sex and Year of Child's Enrollment

Provenzano & Luria, 1974), and differential behavior which varies both with sex of the parent and sex of the infant (Moss, 1967; Thoman, Leiderman, & Olson, 1972; Seavey, Katz, & Zalk, 1975; Will, Self, & Datan, 1976) has been cited in Chapter II.

Self-help skills. Girls exceeded boys in the number of self-help skills reported in every year studied. The mean number of self-help skills was 5.3 for boys and 7.0 for girls (Figure 5). Hoyenga and Hoyenga (1979, p. 326) cited a number of studies which suggested that females are "better at the coordination of small-muscle movements and have greater finger dexterity," and have greater control over small muscles. Because many of the self-help activities in the list from which the parent selected did involve small muscle movements (e.g. tie shoes, lace shoes, brush teeth, put on and take off wraps, dress and undress self), the findings of a greater number of self-help skills in girls was consistent with increased small-muscle control.

Personality characteristics. Both girls and boys were most frequently described as "happy," "cheerful," and "affectionate," with small variations in the other characteristics (refer back to Table 17, Chapter IV). Boys were described as "happy" (91%), "affectionate" (87%), and "cheerful" (85%), and girls were described as "affectionate" (89%), "cheerful" (87%), and "happy" (83%). Many personality characteristics were attributed almost equally to both sexes: "changeable" (26% of boys and 25% of girls), "shy" (23% of boys and 24% of girls), "calm" (32% of boys and 31% of girls), "well-adjusted" (66% of both boys and girls), "cheerful" (85% of boys and 87% of girls), "trustful" (63% of boys and 66% of girls) and "affectionate" (87% of boys and 89% of girls).

The frequency with which certain characteristics were described varied with sex. Boys were more likely to be described as "courageous" (34% of boys and 25% of girls). These findings were consistent for four out of five years sampled as well as for the entire group. Girls were more likely to be described as bossy (18% for boys vs. 28% for girls), as "aggressive" (31% for boys vs. 37% for girls) and as one who "whines" (18% for boys and 27% for girls). Aggressiveness has more frequently been associated with boys in society, and in both samples from the 1960's boys were more likely to be described as "aggressive." The reverse was true, however, in 1973 (28% of boys vs. 48% of girls), in 1978 (12% of boys and 29% of girls) and in 1983 (26% of boys and 36% of girls). Perhaps parents in the more recent years have been less reluctant to label girls as "aggressive."

Family activities. The mean of family activities was identical for boys and girls in the current study. This group of parents appeared equally involved with children of both sexes.

Sex interest. In response to the question "Has the child shown any interests in his own body?" there were no sex differences overall; the parents of 81% of boys and 80% of girls answered "yes" (Table 26). Slightly more boys than girls (72% vs. 63%) were reported to have noticed the difference between boys and girls, whereas slightly more girls than boys (41% vs. 34%) were reported to have asked "where babies come from."

Methods of control. There were no marked differences in the frequency of using various methods of control when boys were compared to girls; "speaking in a firm voice" was the most frequent method of

control for both boys and girls and "praising" was the second most frequent method for both sexes. This result is consistent with findings by Margolin and Patterson (1975) that mothers (but not fathers) were uninfluenced by the sex of the child when disciplining. Their study, however, only evaluated positive methods. Twice as many parents of boys as parents of girls mentioned spanking and rewarding as the most effective method. Yarrow et al. (1962) found that women generally delivered more negative consequences to boys than to girls; this fact might explain the increase in spanking as an effective method of control for boys but does not explain an increase in rewarding. All other methods were mentioned with approximately the same frequency for both boys and girls.

Fears. One area in which no sex differences in the total sample were found was in answer to the question about the child's fears. Children's fears were reported by the parents of 53% of boys and 52.5% of girls. Ausubel stated, "In our culture, in accordance with differential social expectations, girls exceed boys in almost all categories of fear expression" (1980, p. 285), a statement not supported by the data in this study. Although no differences were noted in total fears reported in the current study, in three years out of five more boys than girls were reported to have fears; in one year both groups were the same and in only one year were girls reported to have more fears than boys did (Table 22).

Age of the Child and Parental Perceptions

Belsky, Lerner and Spanier (1984, p. 96) noted that "next to gender, the characteristics of the child that probably exerts [sic] the

most pronounced impact upon the parenting he receives is his age or developmental status." The authors also suggested that age, per se, is simply a "marker" variable for more subtle developmental processes which include motor coordination and cognitive ability. The parent's perception of child characteristics, the focus of this study, would appear to be a connecting link between the developmental processes of the child and the parent's reaction to that child.

Personality characteristics. Many personality characteristics were reported with considerable consistency for children at all three ages studied. Consistent characteristics included "changeable," "stable," "calm," "well-adjusted," "courageous," "whines" and "happy." Two-year-olds were, in general, reported to be less shy than 3-year-olds were. "Cheerful" was reported more frequently in 4-year-olds (95%) than in 2-year-olds (77%). In three different years, 1963, 1968 and 1978, 100% of 2-year-olds were reported to be affectionate.

Aggressiveness was reported to decrease with age in the group as a whole (Table 18). Although 39% of 2-year-olds were described as "aggressive," only 28% of 4-year-olds were reported as "aggressive." This finding is consistent with observations that as children develop alternative methods of problem solving, they are less likely to rely on physical aggression, and that older children are now likely to have developed mechanisms of internal control (Cohen, 1976). In addition, Cohen (1972) suggested that models of aggression in the environment may serve as a primary source of aggressive instruction. Parents in this study most frequently reported discipline that would not provide aggressive models (i.e. praising, preparing in advance, speaking in a firm

voice). Although "praising" was reported by 40% of respondents as a usual method of control, "spanking" was only reported by 15%.

Fears. In the years 1963-1973, more parents of 2-year-olds answered "yes" when asked if their child had fears. In 1978 and 1983, and for the total group, more parents of 3-year-olds answered "yes." In every year, fewer 4-year-olds were reported to have fears. As noted in the discussion of changes over the years sampled, 3- and 4-year-olds, but not 2-year-olds, showed a consistent but not statistically significant increase in the number of fears reported by the responding parent.

Self-help skills. The increased number of self-help skills (dressing, bathing, and toileting, for example) at each successive age was expected as a reflection both of increased motor coordination on the part of the child and increased expections on the part of the parent. Two-year-olds were reported to have a mean of 2.9 self-help skills, 3-year-olds a mean of 6.4 self-help skills (more than twice as many as 2-year-olds) and 4-year-olds a mean of 8.0 self-help skills.

Family activities. More family activities were reported for 3- and 4-year-olds than for 2-year-olds. Family activities were measured by circling items on a list; it may be that families of 2-year-olds chose different activities rather than fewer activities. An open-ended question provided an opportunity to list additional family activities; responses to this question were not analyzed in the current study.

Sex interest. In the area of sex interest, 3- and 4-year-olds were reported to be slightly more interested in their own bodies than 2-year-olds were. Noticing the difference between boys and girls and asking where babies come from increased markedly in 3-year-olds as

compared to 2-year-olds and again in 4-year-olds as compared with 3-year-olds. Fifty-nine percent of 95 4-year-olds had asked where babies come from; only 2% of 42 2-year-olds had asked this question.

The parents' perception of their child's interest in the difference between boys and girls and the "source" of babies is not directly comparable to the Koblinsky and Atkinson (1982) research which found parents expected to discuss body differences and birth with their child before the age of 5. However, both findings suggest a definite interest in at least these sex-related topics among preschool children and their parents.

Discipline. Although there was virtually no difference by age in the methods of control reported to be used most frequently, the effectiveness of reasoning increased with age. Two percent of parents of 2-year-olds, 19% of parents of 3-year-olds, and 30% of parents of 4-year-olds reported reasoning as the most effective method of control, a finding consistent with increasing cognitive development.

In response to discipline, 4-year-olds were most frequently reported to be more obedient, whereas 2- and 3-year-olds were most frequently reported to cry. Crying is a remarkably effective aversive stimulus for infants and small children who lack other types of communicative skills. By the age of 4 children may be expected to have a greater repertoire of skills and greater internal control. The finding that reasoning is reported as the most effective method of control and children are reported as responding by becoming more obedient would seem to support this idea.

The Effect of Maternal Employment on Parental Perceptions

A number of studies have reviewed the effect of maternal employment on various aspects of child development (Hoffman, 1979; Cogle & Tasker, 1982; O'Neil, 1978; Gold & Andres, 1978). None, however, examined parental perceptions of children. In the current study, self-help skills, family activities, child personality characteristics, and usual and effective methods of control were examined in relation to the employment status of the mother. Maternal employment was classified as full-time outside the home (12.5%), part-time outside the home (16.5%), full-time homemaker (56.9%), and "other," a category including mothers who worked at home full-time or part-time, full-time students, and retired mothers (6.3%). Employment data were not available for 7.8% of mothers.

Self-help skills. It could be postulated that the mother who worked full-time or part-time might encourage more self-help skills in her child because of the multiple demands on her time. This proposition was not true in the study sample. For mothers employed full-time 6.4 self-help skills were reported; 6.3 self-help skills were reported when mothers were employed part-time; 5.7 skills, when mother was a full-time homemaker; and 6.1 skills, for the remaining mothers.

Family activities. Yarrow et al. (1962) found that college educated working mothers planned more shared activities with children than did nonworking mothers. The findings in the current study were similar, although the differences were not statistically significant (Chi-square = 126.8, df = 112, NS). When mothers worked outside the home full-time, 12.7 family activities were reported; 12.1 activities

were reported for mothers working part-time; 9.9 activities for full-time homemakers, and 10.3 activities for the remaining mothers.

Child characteristics. "Happy," "affectionate" and "cheerful" were the most frequent characteristics cited by respondents to describe children, whatever the employment status of the mother (Table 19). Mothers employed full-time outside the home cited "happy" (91%), "cheerful" (91%), and "affectionate" (88%) most frequently. Mothers employed part-time reported their children as happy (91%), affectionate (91%), and cheerful (88%). Full-time homemakers reported children as affectionate (88%). In the mothers studied, neither maternal employment outside the home nor full-time homemaking seemed to affect a positive perception of the child.

Method of control. "Speaking in a firm voice," "praising," and "offering choices" were the usual methods of control reported, whatever the employment status of the mother (Table 40). When mothers were employed full-time (94%) and part-time (93%), "speaking in a firm voice" was cited as the usual method of control; when mothers were full-time homemakers (85%), "praising" was reported as the most frequent, usual method, "speaking in a firm voice" was reported by 81%, the second most frequent response.

"Praising" (34%) was cited as the most effective method of control when mothers were employed full-time; "offering choices" (31%) and "isolating" (31%) were the most frequent choices when mother was employed part-time, and "praising" (30%) when mother was a full-time homemaker (Table 41).

The employment status of the mother did not appear to be an important factor in the reported perceptions of the child. Although there were small variations in reports of methods of control, the methods used were positive; less positive methods such as threatening and scolding were reported infrequently by all groups (refer back to Tables 40 and 41, Chapter IV).

Ordinal Position of the Child in the Family and Parental Perceptions

Ausubel (1980, p. 208) stated that "parental attitudes toward and treatment of the child vary to some extent with the latter's ordinal position in the family constellation." Differences that have been noted include increased anxiety and decreased permissiveness with first-born children (Clausen, 1966; Sears, 1960), increased affection and decreased spanking with last-born children (Clausen), and decreased parental attention to middle children (Kidwell, 1982).

In the current study data about ordinal position were available for 252 children. Half of the children were first-born; 29.4, second-born; 13.5%, third children; and 7.1%, fourth or higher order births. Ordinal position was analyzed in relation to self-help skills, family activities, reported characteristics, and two measures of discipline, usual method of control and most effective method of control.

Self-help skills. The child's ordinal position in the family was examined in relation to self-help skills, personality characteristics, and "usual" and "most effective" methods of control. Data on self-help skills did not vary with ordinal position of the child. The mean number of self-help skills was 5.8 for first children, 5.6 for second children, and 5.5 for third and higher order children. These findings were not

directly comparable with the literature reviewed (Ausubel et al., 1980; Clausen, 1966; Sears, 1950); however, a finding of no difference is always of interest in relation to birth order.

Family activities. The mean number of family activities was virtually identical for children at all ordinal positions. Parents reported an average of 11.9 activities for first-order children, 12.2 activities for second order children, and 11.5 activities for third-order and above children.

Child characteristics. Birth order did not affect the parents' most frequent characterizations of their children. Whatever their ordinal position in the family, children were most frequently described as "happy," "affectionate" or "cheerful." Of first-order children, 87% were described as "happy;" 84%, as "affectionate;" and 82%, as "cheerful." Of second-order children, 92% were described as "affectionate;" 88%, as "cheerful;" and 84%, as "happy." Third-order or above children were described as "affectionate" (92%), "cheerful" (92%), and "happy" (90%).

Methods of control. Usual methods of control did not vary with birth order (refer back to Table 38, Chapter IV). "Speaking in a firm voice" was most frequently cited as the usual method (89% of first children, 88% of second children and 79% of third children) whereas "praising" was cited second (85% of first children, 87% of second children and 79% of third or higher order children). Of the methods examined by ordinal position, "threatening" was the method cited least frequently by all groups (29% of first children, 26% of second children and 25% of third children).

Slight variation existed in the methods of control reported as most effective (Table 39). For parents of first children, "preparing the child in advance" (34%) and "suggesting" (33%) were cited as most effective. For parents of second children, "suggesting" (44%) and "praising" (33%) were reported "most effective." For parents of third or higher order children, "praising" (23%) and "speaking in a firm voice" (17%) were most frequently cited. "Scolding" and "threatening" were cited with low frequency by all groups.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Beginning with the premise that the perceptions a parent has of a child's characteristics and behavior are important factors in that child's development (Broussard, 1979; Moss, 1967; Thoman, Leiderman, & Olson, 1972), this study examined data from an information sheet, Your Child and His Development (Appendix), completed by the parents of 257 children, aged 2, 3, and 4, enrolled in the Toddler Two and Nursery School programs at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, in the years 1963, 1968, 1973, 1978, and 1983.

In an analysis of family characteristics, a remarkable consistency was apparent in the five sample years. Maternal age ranged from a mean of 31.8 years in 1973 to 34.3 years in 1963; the mean for all mothers was 32.6 years. Paternal age varied from 34.5 years in 1983 to 37.4 years in 1963; the mean for all fathers was 35.6 years. Mothers averaged 15.8 years of education, varying from a mean of 15.4 years in 1963 to 16.0 years in 1978. Fathers averaged 16.7 years of education, varying from a mean of 16.3 years in 1968 to 17.4 years in 1978. The major fields of study most frequently reported by mothers were education, humanities, and home economics; fathers most frequently majored in business, chemistry-physics-engineering, and medicine. On the Reiss scale of Socioeconomic Index for Occupations, 80% of employed mothers and 95% of employed fathers scored either 9 or 10 (10 is the highest possible ranking). The majority of mothers in all years surveyed were

full-time homemakers; there was a mean of 56.9% for all years with a range from 50.8% in 1973 to 63% in 1963. However, the percentage of mothers working part-time outside the home increased from 13% in 1963 to 26.5% in 1983, the only marked change in the family demographics in the population studied. Family size decreased slightly, from an average of 2.4 children in 1963 to 1.9 children in 1978 and 1983.

In a time period during which many families in the United States have experienced an increase in divorce rates, in female-headed households, and in employment of mothers of young children, the families in the study population have changed very little, with the exception of an increase in part-time employment.

Perceptions of Children

From the record Your Child and His Development specific areas were chosen for analysis. These areas were self-help skills (dressing, toileting, and bathing, for example), family activities (nature walks, picnics, and marketing, for example), child characteristics (affectionate, cheerful, and aggressive, for example), fears, behaviors needing help (thumbsucking, babytalk, and selfishness, for example), sex interest, and several questions related to discipline (characteristic discipline, usual and most effective methods of control, and the response of the child to discipline). These areas were analyzed to answer the following questions:

1. Did parental perceptions vary with the year in which the child was enrolled?

2. Did the child's sex affect parental perceptions?

3. Did the child's age affect parental perceptions?

4. Did the mother's employment status affect parental perceptions?

5. Did the ordinal position of the child affect parental perceptions?

Just as family characteristics remained essentially stable over the two decades studied, so too did parental reports of their children. Whether examined from the perspectives of time of the child's enrollment, child's age, sex, or ordinal position in the family, or the mother's employment, parental responses reported a remarkably consistent picture of the children. Children were described in positive terms as "happy," "affectionate," "cheerful" in contrast to descriptions in the literature such as those of Hetherington, Cox and Cox in which divorced parents reported their children to be "more dependent," "disobedient," "aggressive," "whining," "demanding" and "unaffectionate" than children were in intact families.

Discipline was primarily reported to be nonphysical; speaking in a firm voice and praising were the methods of control reported most frequently. Parents found reasoning an increasingly effective method of control as children grew older, a finding consistent with increasing cognitive development.

Other findings consistent with knowledge of child development were the increased number of self-help skills reported as children grew older, a somewhat greater number of self-help skills in girls than in boys, and the child's increased interest as he grew older in his own body, in the difference between boys and girls, and in "where babies come from." The decrease in crying, the chief response to discipline of

2- and 3-year-olds, and the increase in becoming more obedient, the major response of 4-year-olds, is also consistent with an increase in internal control and a greater repertoire of skills as children develop. The number of family activities increased very slightly (a mean of one activity per family) in families with 3-year-olds in comparison with families with 2-year-olds.

The trend of an increased number of fears reported by parents of 3- and 4-year-old children, although not statistically significant, bears further investigation.

Four models of the relationship between family change and perception of children were proposed.

(1) Family change → changing perceptions of children

(2) Family change → no changing perceptions of children

(3) No family change → changing perceptions of children

(4) No family change → no changing perceptions of children

It was hypothesized that data would best fit the first model, i.e., that there would be changes both in family characteristics and in perceptions of children. Certainly data from the Statistical Abstracts of the United States reviewed in Chapter I suggested family change. However, data from this sample fit the fourth model. Both family change and changes in perceptions of children were minimal. No statistically significant change was identified. This finding suggests that this data base can be highly useful in future research of several types.

Recommendations for Future Research

An additional purpose of the current research was an evaluation of data collected in the Toddler Two and Nursery School programs for

possible future research. The findings of the current research have suggested a Nursery School population that is highly homogenous with respect to marital status, education level, and occupation level of the parents over a period of two decades. These findings can be confirmed by a random sample of children enrolled in other years. If subsequent sampling confirms the finding of homogeneity over time, the data base can then be used as a whole to investigate a number of interesting and important questions. Data are available from the records of more than one thousand children; through random sampling of a homogeneous population, a cohort of children can be drawn to explore a variety of issues.

Future studies can be divided into three categories: studies which further explore relationships within the data base Your Child and His Development; studies which compare the data base from Your Child and His Development with data from other populations; and studies which utilize other data in the child's record in comparison with parental perceptions.

Studies within the data base Your Child and His Development. The following studies serve as examples of the potential of this data base.

1. In addition to the self-help skills and family activities previously discussed, information on eating, sleeping habits, elimination, and play can form the basis of a holistic picture of preschool children over the years beginning in 1963. Among the questions a researcher might ask are the following: Have feeding problems increased or decreased? Have patterns of favorite foods and disliked foods changed or remained similar? Are food allergies more common? Do children get more or less sleep in 1983 than in 1963? Do more or fewer

children have a room of their own? Is there a change in the pattern of daily naps or rest periods? Can a pattern be identified to describe the initiation of toilet training? Do children prefer playing alone or with companions? What are favorite toys for indoor and outdoor play? What activities do parents enjoy with their children? How much time is spent watching television? Do children have imaginary playmates?

These questions and others that are similar can be analyzed by sex, by age, by year in which the child was enrolled, and by a variety of family characteristics. In addition to family characteristics that have been used in this study, religious preference, civic activities of parents, the presence of other adults in the home and the time the child is in the care of other adult are possible variables that may explain differences in child characteristics and behavior. These additional family variables may also prove interesting in the analysis of the child variables analyzed in the current study.

2. Many children have entered programs at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, prior to their second birthday and remained for three to four years. For each year a child was enrolled, a parent has completed Your Child and His Development. The opportunity to follow parent perceptions of an individual child through the toddler and preschool period provided by this data base is unique. Both variables used in the current research--personalities characteristics, fears, discipline, and sex interest, for example--and other variables included in Your Child and His Development such as routines of daily life, playmates, and favorite activities can be examined over a period of several critical years of development to provide a rich picture of child

development. No similar data are reported in the child development literature.

3. Adoption. The number of adoptive children in this sample (14) was considered too small to analyze separately in the current study. However, if 5.4% of the total population of children (the percentage in this sample) were adopted, perceptions of parents of adoptive children could be compared with the perceptions of other parents from this population. Is there a difference in the way adoptive parents describe their children or discipline their children? Are adoptive children reported to have fewer or more self-help skills or is there no difference? When a variety of questions which are answered in this data base are examined, a picture of adoptive families in contrast to nonadoptive families can be developed. It may be that no differences exist; this conclusion will be an important finding as well.

4. Some topics that have been explored in the current study such as the trend toward parents' reports of more fears in children in recent years need further research in years other than those sampled.

Studies comparing data base with other populations. The homogeneity of this group of parents makes comparison of these data with other groups who may be different in regard to variables such as marital or socioeconomic status an interesting possibility. For example, the literature reviewed in Chapter II suggested that divorced mothers may view their children very differently than married mothers do. The checklist of adjectives describing child characteristics might be given to single parents and a comparison could be made. Similar evaluations could be made using other data, discipline techniques, response to discipline, and family activities, for example.

Studies utilizing the child's record. In addition to Your Child and His Development, each child's folder in the Nursery Schools at University of North Carolina, Greensboro, contains additional data that could be compared with data about parental perceptions. For example, progress reports describing observations of children and home visit reports are available in most folders. Medical records indicate variations in health status which may be related to parental perceptions.

For children entering the Nursery School programs in future years, consideration could be given to studies which would utilize questions similar to those available in Your Child and His Development as a part of observations recorded. For example, utilizing the same checklists observers could rate child characteristics or behavior needing improvement. Comparable data from parental and observational studies would be useful both at the time the data were gathered and in developing a body of data over time.

Changes in Your Child and His Development. It is the consistency of the data obtained through the record Your Child and His Development over a period of years that makes the document so valuable for the study of parental perceptions of children over time. That consistency should be maintained over time.

Currently, the record does not indicate the relationship of the person completing the record to the child. This information would be helpful in future analyses and could be added to the record with little difficulty.

Conclusion

Data within the files of the Toddler Two and Nursery School programs at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, provide a collection of valuable resource material that can be useful to child and family researchers for many years. On a wider scale, programs in other universities may also possess similar valuable data which could be utilized in further comparisons. Such resources can contribute substantially to knowledge of children and their families and should be utilized far more frequently than they have been in the past.

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APPENDIX

DEPARTMENT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY RELATIONS
SCHOOL OF HOME ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

FORM 19

YOUR CHILD AND HIS DEVELOPMENT

__Carter Center__Nursery School__Infant Care Project__Toddler Two Center

This information is requested in order to help the staff and you, the child's parents, to gain a better understanding your child. Please feel free to add any additional information which you think might be helpful. When you have a conference with a staff member you may wish to discuss some of these items in more detail.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Date_____

Name of Child_____ What is Child Called?_____

Sex_____ Place of Birth_____ Date of Birth_____

Was child adopted?_____ At what age?_____ Does he know?_____

Church Preference_____

List any religious dietary practices the child observes_____

_____

II. FAMILY AND HOME

Parents:

Father's Name_____

Mother's Maiden Name_____

Present Address_____ Phone_____

Length of residence at present address_____

Are parents separated?_____ Divorced?_____
Are either of the above step-parents?_____

II. FAMILY AND HOME (Continued)

	FATHER	MOTHER
Date of birth		
Place of birth		
Height		
Weight		
Health		
No. Brothers_____ Sisters_____		No. Brothers_____ Sisters_____

Father:

Education: High School and Colleges attended: (Indicate Below)

	NAME	DEGREE	MAJOR FIELD
1.			
2.			
3.			

Occupation:_____

Civic Activity: Organizations and Church Interests

	NAME OF ORGANIZATIONS
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

II. FAMILY AND HOME (Continued)

Mother:

Education: High School and Colleges attended: (Indicate Below)

	NAME	DEGREE	MAJOR FIELD
1.			
2.			
3.			

Occupation: Present or previous occupations other than housewife (Indicate whether part or full time)

Civic Activity: Organizations and Church Interests

	NAME OF ORGANIZATIONS
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

List all children in the family in order of birth. Include every child born into the family:

NAME	SEX	AGE	BIRTHDATE	PRESENT GRADE IN SCHOOL

Are any of the above siblings half or step-siblings?_____

Are any siblings deceased?_____

II. FAMILY AND HOME (Continued)

List other members of the household:

NAME	AGE	RELATION TO CHILD

List time child is in care of persons other than parents.
Daily?_____ Weekly?_____

Where had child lived since birth and for how long?

Has child been separated from either parent for a long period of time?_____

If so, how did child react?

III. ROUTINES

A. Eating

As a rule is your child's appetite excellent, good, fair, poor?_____ Does your child eat alone or with family?_____

Can child feed himself completely?_____ Partially?_____

List food allergies_____

List any foods eliminated by doctor's orders_____

List favorite foods_____

List foods especially disliked_____

Name_____ and amount_____ of daily vitamin supplement. Any feeding problems?_____

III. ROUTINES (Continued)

B. Sleeping

Approximate time child goes to bed_____

Approximate time child wakes in the morning_____

Attitude at bed time_____. Usual activities before going to bed_____

Does child have a room of his own?_____ Sleep alone?_____

Daily nap?_____ Length of nap_____ If not, does child have a rest period during the day?_____

C. Elimination

At what age was training started for:

Bowel control_____ Responses to training_____

Bladder control_____ Responses to training_____

Is control now established during the day?_____ Night?_____

Does child state need for Urination____ What does he say?_____

Bowel Movement____ What does he say?_____

Is child taken up at night?_____ Time_____ State any irregularities or difficulties connected with toileting?

D. Self-Help

Circle those things which the child usually does himself.

Dress himself, undress himself, wash face, wash hands, bathe himself, use toilet for urination, use toilet for bowel movement, put on wraps, take off wraps, put clothes away, puts toys away, lace shoes, brush teeth, comb hair, tie shoes.

IV. ACTIVITIES

Where does the child play when indoors?_____

Where does the child play when outdoors?_____

Is child happy playing alone?_____ Does he prefer the companionship of children or adults?_____

List age and sex of child's most frequent playmates: Age_____

Sex_____

Child's favorite indoor toys and play equipment are_____

Child's favorite outdoor toys and play equipment are_____

Favorite activities_____

Does he get along well with children in his own family?_____

Does he get along well with children outside his own family?_____

Amount of time child spends each day with Father_____ Mother_____

Circle the activities jointly engaged in by members of the family and the child:

Reading, listening to music, routines, hobbies, excursions to park, airport, railroad, marketing, nature walks, picnics, gardening and yard work, television, playing ball, drive-in movies, stores, cooking, helping with household duties, riding.

Other_____

Does child enjoy stories?____ Who usually reads to him?_____

Can your child read?_____

What activities do you enjoy with our child?_____

_____

IV. ACTIVITIES (Continued)

Activities your family does as a group?_____

_____

What music experiences are provided for the child?_____

_____

Time spent daily watching television_____ Types of program_____

_____

Is child dependent on adult direction and suggestion for his play activities?_____

List child's pets_____

Has child attended a play group before?_____

Where?_____ How often?_____

Does your child have a group experience outside his home regularly?

_____

Difficulties encountered in play situations?_____

Any unusual experiences or extensive travel?_____

Does child have imaginary playmates?_____ Describe_____

_____

V. BEHAVIOR AND DEVELOPMENT

Parents' methods of control of child:

Circle those words which describe the usual methods of control:

Ignoring, isolating, scolding, threatening, depriving of pleasure, spanking, bribing, coaxing, rewarding, praising, comparing unfavorably with others, offering choices, suggesting, reasoning, demonstrating, diverting, preparing child in advance, speaking in firm voice

V. BEHAVIOR AND DEVELOPMENT (Continued)

Mother's discipline of child: Rigid, stern, reasonably firm, easy-going, very lax, sometimes stern - sometimes lax.

Father's discipline of child: Rigid, stern, reasonably firm, easy-going, very lax, sometimes stern - sometimes lax.

Usual reaction of child to discipline: Afraid, defiant, sorry, sulks, cries, temper-tantrums, indifferent, more obedient, regards it as a joke.

Personality traits: Circle all words which describe the child's usual personality behavior: irritable, lazy, slow, unstable, changeable, shy, timid, self-conscious, inattentive, flighty, bossy, aggressive, stable, calm, self-controlled, well-adjusted, "spoiled," courageous, cheerful, trustful, antagonistic, suspicious, whines, becomes angry easily, happy, affectionate, patient.

Circle any of the following items with which you feel you need help:

Thumb-sucking, finger-sucking, nail biting, masturbation, baby talk, inability to swallow solid foods, speech defect, poor articulation, stuttering, refusal to talk, lying, swearing, running away, destructive, cruel to other children,

V. BEHAVIOR AND DEVELOPMENT (Continued)

Personality Traits: (Continued)

teases, seeks attention, selfish, quarrelsome, temper-tantrums, over-affectionate, jealous, eats dirt, day dreams, supicious, sensitiveness, picks at parts of body, timidity, lack of self-confidence, feeling of insecurity, fighting, submissiveness, anxiety, awkwardness, nose picking, twitching, excitability.

Anything else you would like to add:

Has child shown fear of anything?____ What?_____

What things repeatedly cause conflict between parent and child?_____

Any very unusual circumstance which has taken place in your family?_____

Child's reaction to these unusual circumstances_____

_____

Sex Interest and Instruction

Has child shown any interest in his own body?_____

Does your child know the proper names for the parts of his body?_____

Has he noticed or asked about differences between boys and girls?_____

Has he asked where babies comes from?_____

How did you meet the situation?_____